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ELIZABETH'S PRETENDERS

HAMILTON AÏDÉ

AUTHOR OF

"RITA," "POET AND PEER," "A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY," ETC.

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ELIZABETH'S PRETENDERS.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

One of the most prominent men in the great manufacturing town which I shall call Whiteburn, was the late Anthony Shaw. He was not wholly a self-made man; rather a self-uplifted man. His father, beginning life as a common mechanic, had amassed a considerable fortune, which he divided between his two sons. To Anthony, who had been associated with him in business during the last few years of his life, were left the iron works at Whiteburn, and the substantial house in the town. The younger son, William, a man with a limited capacity for fox-hunting and billiards, and little else to serve as a breastplate to a soft credulous heart, found himself the possessor of a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. He bought himself a small estate in an adjoining county, within reach of two packs of hounds; and, in process of time, he also bought himself a wife.

Fortune had, apparently, smiled on both brothers, each after his kind. Anthony, with his remarkable business

capacity, his liberality, and his unswerving rectitude, was unquestionably the man to whom more people applied for advice and assistance than to any other in Whiteburn. In municipal matters, and on public questions, his judgment was always of great weight; it might, indeed, at one time have been said to be paramount. But that was before he had retired from business. He had not married until he was forty-five, by which time he had nearly doubled the fortune he had inherited twenty years before. The lady of his choice was a refined, fragile woman, no longer in her first youth, who had been a governess, and had lived a great deal in France. The change from a clear sky that did not rain blacks, to the poisonous air, and canopy of smoke and cloud that were the inalienable property of Whiteburn, was afflicting to Mrs. Shaw. But she never complained. It was Anthony's unsolicited doing—the removal to that old timbered mansion, which stood folded away among the hills aloof from the blackness of the town. Here lived for fourteen years Anthony's helpmeet and worthy companion, and died, leaving an only child of twelve years to the sorrowing father's care. To both, the disappointment of having no son had been great; to Anthony it meant the alteration of all the plans he had built for the future. His brother had no child; his kindred were all dead, or dispersed beyond the seas; there was no one to succeed him in his prosperous business. Before his wife died, he began to entertain the idea of forming the concern into a company; but it was not till some years later that he actually retired.

Until her mother's death, Elizabeth had been educated

by a French governess, under Mrs. Shaw's direct supervision. No longer strong enough to teach herself, she watched her child's progress with vigilance, and not wholly without anxiety. Elizabeth was remarkably clever, but she was not easy to manage, and needed very careful handling. In some respects she was more like a boy than a girl; of indomitable courage, turbulent and headstrong, but easily moved when her heart was appealed to, and of unusual constancy in her affections. She sobbed, night after night, when her old nurse left, and her resentment against the successor in this office took the form of cutting to pieces that blameless functionary's best petticoat. Poor Mrs. Shaw, lying on the sofa, and watching the clouds and sunshine chase each other across the little passionate face, beneath its thatch of dark tumbled hair, had many an uneasy moment as regarded the child's future. Her character, she saw, would greatly depend on the influences brought to bear upon it in early youth. Now, her governess was a clever woman, but lacking height or depth of thought. When her pupil began to reason as to cause and effect, to seek for motives, and to argue upon abstract principles of right and wrong, it was clear that mademoiselle would be left floundering. She was an upright woman, stuffed full of knowledge, and with a certain force of will; but the time was drawing near, as Mrs. Shaw saw, when Elizabeth, putting away childish things, would need something more than authority and subjunctive moods; she would require the contact of a strong and thoughtful mind. Without this, there was no saying what she might grow up to be.

Mrs. Shaw, upon her sofa, so pale and gentle, so devoid of moral blemish, formed a contrast to her child, which mademoiselle could never understand. "*C'est comme une poule qui a couvé un canard!*" she frequently exclaimed. In reality, there were qualities akin in both. Under the mother's quiet exterior was hidden a tenacity of purpose, a capacity of endurance, above all, a keen far-sighted perception, which she herself recognized in her little daughter, alongside of her impetuosity and wilfulness. Mademoiselle spoke of her pupil as "*un enfant gâté.*" *She* made Elizabeth obey, but it was currently believed no one else could. Certainly, not her father. But, then, he never tried. He saw her at early morning, before he went to his office, when she ran out to the hall door and gave a piece of sugar to the horse on which he rode into town. He never failed to send for her when he returned, and there was generally an hour of romps between the father and child in the gloaming. In all this there was no question of discipline. Mrs. Shaw knew it better than any one, and, like another mother, she "laid up all these things in her heart."

She knew she must die soon. Though never breathing a word of this to her husband, she had no self-delusion on the subject. It might be a year sooner or later, but the malady from which she suffered was fatal; she would never live to see her daughter grow up. Elizabeth was now eleven: what was best to be done for her? The question was scarcely ever absent for very long from Mrs. Shaw's mind. It would be a great wrench to Anthony to be parted from his little girl, especially when left alone in the world; but if it was for her good—if

his wife made this clear to him—he would certainly not object to her being sent to school.

She heard of one that seemed to offer exceptional advantages in Elizabeth's case. The principal was a remarkable woman, of rather broad religious views (some called them "lax"), who was said to have exercised an extraordinary influence for good over several girls committed to her care. Those who shook their heads over her "laxity," went further; they declared she was altogether too unconventional in her treatment of many other subjects to please them. This argument pleaded strongly in her favour with Mrs. Shaw. Elizabeth would never stand views cut, dried, and buttered for her consumption. She would require a certain independence and flexibility of judgment, which scholastics seldom admit. The conviction grew slowly stronger and stronger in the mother's mind that here was the direction her child needed.

Elizabeth was sent from home six months before her mother died. Anthony was wholly unprepared for the blow when it fell. Like many another devoted husband, his eyes were blinded, and he never knew what she suffered. Only a few days before she died, feeling that the last change was at hand, she said to him, in her habitual slow, sweet way—

"I don't think I shall be very long here, Anthony, and I want to talk to you about Elizabeth. We did right in sending her to school. I feel sure of it now. I am only so sorry for you, dear, left quite alone; but I hope you will marry again some nice woman—she must be a *very* nice woman—who will be a mother to Elizabeth. It is

quite natural and right that you should marry—and I hope you will have a son. But"—here she paused, and stroked the strong cold hand that lay in hers—"Elizabeth is a strange child, you know, Anthony. She may resent another's taking my place. What I want you to promise me is, that if she is not happy at home, you will not oblige her to live here with a stepmother. That would be so bad for her—so bad for her character, I mean. Let her go to her uncle for her holidays—or make any other arrangement; but don't force her to live here, when you have other ties, if she is unhappy."

It was strange to hear the poor little woman calmly discussing eventualities after her death. Anthony listened, as one in a dream. Presently he said—

"My wife, if this be true—if we are indeed to part before long—you take the best part of my life with you. Do not be troubled about the child. She will be my only companion until she marries; I promise you that."

"No; you must not say so. That is not what I meant," she interposed, with her calm decisiveness. "Your happiness is not to be sacrificed to her. You have yet many years, probably, before you; and your desire, I know, has always been that a son of yours should carry on the business. I hope it may yet be so, Anthony. I do, with all my heart."

He said nothing, and the subject was never again alluded to by either of them. But when his wife died, and the widower of fifty-seven, still a hale, vigorous man, showed no disposition to choose another mate, his men-friends expressed their surprise; his women-friends —the friends of his late wife—felt distinctly aggrieved.

He owed it to Elizabeth to provide her with a second mother; he owed it to himself to provide a small heir to the firm, if possible. Neither consideration, apparently, weighed with him. Or, if the latter had any weight, as it undoubtedly would have had under different circumstances, it was counterbalanced by the dangers attending such a step. His first object in life was his child; her happiness might be imperilled, and her home rendered insupportable to her, by a stepmother. He never forgot his dead wife's words. It is true that, far from exacting his abstinence from a second union, she had urged it upon him. But she had pointed out a difficulty which he might otherwise have overlooked; and that was enough for him. The voluntary promise he had made her, though rejected, he held binding; and happily he had never any personal temptation to break it. No woman he looked upon, however fair, seemed worthy to take the place of her who was gone.

The years slid by. He gave less time to his business, which was too firmly established to call for much personal supervision, and divided the leisure that he gained between his public duties in the town and certain philanthropic schemes which he had started. He was generally alone; but occasionally his brother or a friend stayed with him, and once or twice Mrs. William Shaw accompanied her husband on these visits. She had not been long married at that time, and was an unknown quantity to her brother-in-law. He knew she was a half-pay captain's daughter, who had been brought up at Boulogne, and that it was considered a wonderful "catch" for her when she married William. She was certainly a very pretty woman, of the

fair fluffy order of woman, with a touch of the Angora cat, and china-blue eyes. Her movements, too, were graceful, but feline. She gave one the notion of always playing with a worsted ball, as she flung herself upon the sofa, showing her tiny feet, or bounded across the room, or flung her white arm round her niece. One thing was un-catlike: she never scratched, or showed any indication of cruelty or spite; on the contrary, she seemed good nature and sprightliness personified. Her appearance in the neighbourhood of Whiteburn was always a great social event. She was regarded as a walking advertisement of the last fashions, and took infinite pains to please not only the dullest men, but the dowdiest women. The favourable impression she made on Anthony as a kindly little creature, with now and again flashes of unlooked-for brightness, was no doubt strengthened by the affection she manifested for Elizabeth. Having no children of her own, she declared that she felt like a mother to her niece.

Elizabeth was then nearly sixteen. During the three years which had intervened since her mother's death, she had returned to Whiteburn every six months; and these holidays were the most delightful weeks of Anthony's solitary life. The girl was growing rapidly, and promised to be very tall. It was difficult to say if she would be good-looking or not; at present she was angular and abrupt in movement. But her mind and her character had alike developed. She was already a delightful companion to her father, and gave him no trouble. They took long rides; they read Walter Scott together of an evening. Anthony had always loved literature and art, and his child inherited his tastes. He had a fine library,

and some good modern pictures—chiefly French; and for these Elizabeth had always shown a fondness. To her father's surprise, he found that she had now acquired a considerable proficiency in drawing. She more than once said to him, "I wish I could be a painter—that is what I should like best." And Anthony smiled—indulgently. He remonstrated when he found her seated on a tub in the yard, sketching one of the stable-boys in his shirt-sleeves. He felt somehow or other it was not quite "the thing," though it was difficult to explain to her exactly *why*. Anthony was a curious man; he was reluctant to remove the bloom from a fresh young mind by conventional ideas of "propriety," but he was not above wincing at the thought of what his neighbours might say. Elizabeth wished to take portraits of all the household, beginning with the aged housekeeper, and ending with the tall footman of five and twenty. She opened her black eyes wide when her father said he must draw the line at the footman. She could not understand why youth should not be immortalized by her pencil as well as age—sex being an accident of no importance. But she yielded with an astonishingly good grace. Time was when she would have rebelled; she only looked at her father now, more in sorrow than in anger. She loved him dearly; she would not vex him for the world; but there were, of course, points upon which sixteen was more enlightened—had wider views—than sixty could be expected to possess.

There were, in fact, in many of their discursive talks together, certain avenues down which Elizabeth would fearlessly plunge, till she found herself pulled up by a dead wall.

"I suppose you are an agnostic, father?" she said tentatively, one day, as they rode alongside a burn among the hills. "Most clever men are, I am told."

He was too startled to reply for a minute or two. Then he said, "I believe in God, and in a future life—where I shall meet your mother again, Bessie. Don't let any one shake you in that belief, my dear. As to the rest, it is not a subject for discussion, I think." And turning in his saddle, he drew her attention to the purple cloud-shadows flitting across the face of the hills on the other side of the valley.

Another time she asked him if he thought a man and his wife ought to continue to live together when there was no longer any love between them.

"Have they not sworn to take each other for 'better or worse'?" he replied.

"But if the man breaks *his* part of the contract, is the woman bound to keep *hers?*" the girl continued.

"Certainly," he replied, hurriedly. "There is one law for men and another for women. It would be very dangerous to the community if it were otherwise. You must learn to understand that fact, my dear. Look at that sunset. Glorious! We shall have a fine day to-morrow."

"I think it much better for a woman not to marry, father," persisted Elizabeth, regardless of the sunset.

"Nonsense, Bessie! You will think very differently some day, when you fall in love."

"I shall never fall in love," said Elizabeth; then added sententiously, "I think falling in love is all nonsense."

Her father laughed heartily, but she continued with perfect gravity—

"I shall live with you, here—we two alone; only I should like to go to London for a time, and learn to paint; and then I shall come back here and paint magnificent pictures. You smile, father. Why not? Why shouldn't I become famous? There was Elisabetta Sirani—and Angelica Kauffmann; and I'm sure I could paint in time better than *her*."

"I say! where's your grammar, Bessie?" laughed her father. "When *I* went to school, I was taught to say, 'better than she;' but I suppose that is obsolete. Well, I am glad to see you are ambitious. Ambition of the right sort—the ambition to excel in whatever you undertake—is a good thing. And you are not too humble," he added, with an amused glance at her dark, glowing face; "which, perhaps, is better than having no confidence in yourself, and therefore no decision."

"You don't think I am conceited, father, do you?"

"No, I don't. But it seems to me you have an enormous belief in your own capacity—that is different from conceit—and it may be, you know, that you are mistaken. So many are. The gift 'to see ourselves as others see us' is given to few."

"I am one of the few," she said quickly. "I know I am ugly and awkward. I know I am a fool at mathematics, and can hardly do a rule-of-three sum. I am sometimes shaky in my grammar (as you see); and I have no ear for music—none whatever. It is of no use my continuing to learn the piano; I shall never play decently. But I understand what I read. I am rather quick at languages;

and I have a talent—yes, father, I *know* I have a talent —for drawing, and I shall paint well some day; I am determined I will."

Mr. William Shaw saw his niece more frequently than his wife did, and they got on excellently well together. She was too shrewd not to gauge his intellect justly, or to demand from him more than he was capable of producing. But they went together into the farmyard, and he instructed her as to pigs and shorthorns; and he held forth in the stable as to the points of his brother's horses, and he taught her to drive tandem and to play billiards; and their talk together was always of country things. In a way, they were great friends. He became really fond of the girl, who would be the natural heiress to his own as well as his brother's fortune, and whom he had once regarded as a terribly spoilt child. It cannot be said that, even now, she accommodated herself to every one's society as she did to her uncle's. To some of the elders of Whiteburn she seemed "a savage kind of a gurl;" while their sons declared that Anthony Shaw's daughter had no more manners than a cow, and that "it would require every shilling of her money, by-and-by, to make a fellow look at *her*." It must be confessed that these strictures were not altogether unmerited. Elizabeth's general demeanour towards strangers at this time was not encouraging. Unless she took a fancy to a visitor, or that something which fell from him in conversation with her father interested her, she remained silent, and scarcely answered when spoken to. The feminine desire to please was conspicuously absent in the girl's composition at present, and her father noted it with regret.

Mrs. William Shaw, however, did not complain of this. She declared that dear Bessie's "shyness" was only natural at her age. She knew she would turn out quite charming by-and-by, and she assured Anthony he need be under no apprehension as to his daughter growing up plain.

He replied most truly that he had none. He liked his child's expressive face; but whether others would like it two or three years hence never troubled him. As to her "shyness," he told his sister-in-law it was quite a mistake to fancy Elizabeth was *shy*. She had not yet learned the discipline of life—the expediency, in intercourse with others, of appearing interested in the uninteresting; that was all.

Mrs. William smiled. She always smiled when she did not know exactly what to say.

Elizabeth found she had fewer subjects in common with her aunt than with her uncle; but Mrs. William was more than kind—she was pressing in her invitations to Farley Manor. And then she was so pretty to look at, and wore such lovely colours!—colours which would be so beautiful in a picture, but which the girl felt that *she* would never dare to wear; in short, there was so much to admire, or to be grateful for, in her aunt, that Elizabeth knew she ought to reciprocate more warmly than she did Mrs. William Shaw's demonstrations of affection. There was a grey parrot called "Coco" at Farley, who had clearly been bred in the kitchen, before he was promoted to a perch in the drawing-room, and became the object of Mrs. Shaw's caresses. Elizabeth was always amused by the bird's culinary remarks, but her

affections were not engaged by the cynical old epicurean with his head on one side, cutting into a conversation with the injunction, "Don't put too much sugar in." When he ejaculated, after a pause, "Keep stirring," Elizabeth declared he was as caustic as Pope; but for her part she loved better the robin who twittered on the window-sill—the Burns among the birds. Mrs. Shaw, on the other hand, found in "Coco" an unfailing source of entertainment and delight. She hovered about his perch, she scratched his venerable head, she walked about the room with him on her shoulder, she gave him red peppers—there was no end to the graceful little blandishments she lavished. And then she was hilariously shocked at all his pungent observations. Elizabeth often thought that, artistically, they would make a pretty picture; morally, they were a curious study to the girl.

All this took place during a visit she and her father paid to Farley Manor, when she was nearly seventeen.

Upon that occasion she met for the first time a man who was to exercise a considerable influence upon her after-life. Colonel Wybrowe was five and thirty, of uncommon height and strength, and great distinction of appearance. He was undeniably very handsome, and would have been perfectly so, but for a cast in his left eye, which detracted from the beauty of his face. The beauty, indeed, was almost effeminate in its regularity, except the mouth, which was partially concealed by a long fair moustache. His colouring was splendid—so Elizabeth said; indeed, for splendour of appearance, she could only compare him with a Life-Guardsman whom she had once seen in Hyde Park, and who had appeared

unto her as a god. This colonel had curious manners, unlike any she had encountered in her short journey through the world. He took little notice of her, and the ease and assurance with which he moved and spoke, seemed to imply perfect indifference as to the effect he might produce. At the same time, his courtesy was high-bred, almost old-fashioned in punctiliousness; apparently inherent, as though he would equally have held open the door for the housemaid, or stooped to pick up her broom; and this had more attraction for Elizabeth than had she believed them to be special acts of courtesy to herself. He was as much a chivalrous type as a splendid model. His very standing aloof attracted her, in an impersonal and curious way. Several other young men came and went during that week at Farley Manor, but none other intangled himself in her recollection. Her aunt was a capital hostess, inasmuch as she was always devising schemes of entertainment, and never out of temper. Anthony did not quite like her manners occasionally with some of her guests; her skittishness appeared to him ill suited to a matron; but, then, he was old-fashioned, perhaps, and had not moved with the age. She was so kind to Elizabeth—so anxious that her niece should appear to the best advantage; and under her roof and tutelage so much of the girl's roughness was being smoothed away. His sister-in-law seldom read anything but the *Morning Post* or the *World*. She had no love of art, and, except that she liked animals, and rode well, no two women could have more dissimilar tastes than she and Elizabeth. But Mrs. William, in her light frothy way, could be very amusing, and the girl had a strong

sense of humour. With her companions at school her spirits at times were high, but Anthony himself had seldom seen her so light-hearted, apparently—so like what a girl of her years should be—as she was during this visit.

I dwell on the fact, because the impression left on his mind materially affected the whole conduct of subsequent events. It was just after this that he resolved to turn the flourishing business, of which up till now he had been the sole proprietor, into a joint-stock company, and to retire. I have already said that, since his widowerhood, he had given less time to his own personal business, and more to public works. Why, indeed, should he continue a concern in which there was no one to succeed him? He could realize now a large fortune for Elizabeth. She would leave school in another year, and they should travel abroad. He never yet had had leisure to take her further than Paris. He now would be free to visit all the great galleries of Europe, which the girl longed to see; for her pursuit of art was keener than ever. She had received her first lessons in oils, and there could no longer be a doubt that her confidence in her own powers was justified; she had decided talent. The devoted father's chief thought, since her mother's death, had been his daughter's happiness. Living at Whiteburn all the year round was probably not the best means to secure that. He must cut himself, comparatively, adrift from his old moorings.

And he did so. By the end of the following year the transaction was completed, which transferred the concern into the hands of a company, and left him a fortune of over three hundred thousand pounds.

CHAPTER II.

ELIZABETH was nearly eighteen when she left school; and whatever life might have in store to try her strength, she was better equipped for the battle than most girls of her age. Her fine natural parts had been fortified by contact with a mind whose grasp of realities produced a certain shock to persons indisposed to look facts in the face. She knew something of sin and its consequences. She had read a great deal, she had thought a great deal; but she was not suspicious, and as yet had had no opportunities of applying her abstract knowledge of mankind to the solution of any of life's problems. To an independence of judgment, she joined a decision in action which made her the leader of her companions, and the most trusted of all by the principal of the school. She had very sharply defined limits of right and wrong; and when she did wrong, she never stooped to gloze, or attempted to excuse it. She was still wilful at times, and not always considerate for others, but she was incapable of meanness; and her attachments, though few, were strong.

In appearance she was still lanky, and her movements were too abrupt to be graceful; but she had a noble,

well-shaped head, the strong, waving hair planted low upon the broad brow, beneath which shone two expressive eyes, so thickly shadowed by dark lashes as to appear black. Probably few admired who passed the girl in the street, but she could not fail to arrest attention, and in a room she would probably keep it. The impression she first made was that of pride—a certain remoteness which held her apart. As this wore off, the keen interest she took in whatsoever she saw, and above all, in whatsoever she heard, rendered her face so expressive that to many it appeared beautiful. But this it was not.

Before leaving England on a six months' term, Anthony Shaw thought well to see his old solicitor in London, Joshua Twisden, of Gray's Inn, and introduce Elizabeth to him. He said—

"In case I die, it is well that you should personally know a man whom I regard as a friend—a man whom I have trusted for years, and to whom I should wish you to apply for advice or help in any emergency. I have appointed your uncle as your sole guardian and co-trustee with Twisden, till you are one and twenty, until which time all the income at your disposal will be five hundred a year. That is to enable you to feel free. The trustees will administer the estate, and pay all outgoing expenses. Your uncle will do all that—seeing to the farm, and so on. It is just the sort of thing he can do well. But in any important matter, Elizabeth, you had better consult Twisden."

"Why do you talk like this—as if you were going to die to-morrow?" said the girl, almost angrily. "It spoils all my pleasure!"

"My dear, it doesn't make me die a bit sooner, to be prepared, and to try to prepare you. I may live for the next twenty years; but I want to arrange everything—to make everything as easy for you as I can, if I should be summoned away suddenly. I hope you will marry early; but until you do, I should like you to live with your uncle and aunt. Mind, I don't oblige you to do so. But they are fond of you, and you like them; and, if I should be taken, they are your natural protectors."

This was said in the brougham, as they drove one foggy morning to Gray's Inn. In the outer office sat a young man, who looked fixedly over his desk at Mr. and Miss Shaw as they passed through to the inner sanctuary, where his uncle, Mr. Twisden, awaited them. George Daintree had been for three years in the office. He was an astute young man, with great business capacity, and an excellent address. His uncle had implicit confidence in him, and had found him so clever, that no doubt (being childless) he would ultimately take him into partnership. George was not absolutely good-looking, but he had a fresh Saxon look; clean shaven, with light curly hair, keen blue eyes, and brilliant teeth. It would have been difficult to say what his features were; no matter, the impression left was agreeable, being one of acute intelligence and perfect temper. His linen appeared unusually white, and he was scrupulously neat. Some people produce an effect of cleanliness and neatness which is unfair on others. Daintree was of the number. Anthony had seen the young man once or twice, and shook hands with him on leaving the office. He was not introduced

to Elizabeth, who just glanced at him, and murmured, "Pears' soap," as she followed her father downstairs.

Six months later Anthony Shaw was dead. He never reached his home, but died in London, of a fever caught abroad, it was said, from bad drains. William saw his brother before his death, and received his last wishes; and when all was over, and Elizabeth had followed her father to the grave, her uncle carried her off to Farley, where his wife awaited them, with regulation-mourning, and what our neighbours call a *figure de circonstance.* She folded her arms round her niece; she kissed her effusively; she said, "*Now* your home is here, remember, for as long as you are unmarried." The pale, crushed girl could not fitly respond to all this, but no doubt the kind intention touched her. Between Mrs. William and herself she felt that there was a bridge incapable of supporting more than very light material. Demand too much of it, and it would give way. She could not be comforted; for it seemed to her then that she had lost the only being on earth she cared for, or could ever care for. No one might ever replace her dear, noble father—so unselfish, so wise, so perfect in every relation of life! What an ensample he must ever be to her; and how every word of loving counsel that had fallen from his lips must be treasured by his child!

She constantly recalled what he had said about her uncle and aunt. To Elizabeth all places were alike in those first months; but there is no doubt she would have preferred solitude to the life at Farley, if her father's wishes had not weighed with her. The slowly encroaching tide of visitors—though Mrs. William always declared

she could not possibly have any company—irritated the girl. She knew this was unreasonable. Her aunt could not be expected to shut the door on her numerous friends three months after her brother-in-law was dead. It was natural that her uncle's hunting companions should drop in on their way home, and have some refreshment. Then gradually those who lived afar, when the meet was near Farley, were asked to sleep there the previous night. Few ladies came. Elizabeth did not ask herself why; she only was glad. Women required some attention; men she could leave her aunt to entertain—and, no doubt, she did entertain them. As a rule, they rather fought shy of the dark-browed girl in mourning, who offered them so little encouragement. Colonel Wybrowe, she heard, was in Africa, shooting tigers, but was expected home in the spring. He was the only man she had ever met at Farley in whom she felt any interest, and that was of the mildest description. She thought of him as a picture rather than a man—a Titian or Velasquez, seen by her in one of those great galleries abroad, and never quite forgotten.

Thus the winter passed, and its wounds began to be healed under the sweet breath of spring: the birds lifted up their voices, and the streams which had been frozen about the girl's heart flowed once more. Elizabeth was too healthy, physically and morally, not to feel the influences of the season. She was eighteen, and she was strong. All life was before her; she had been stunned for a time, but now she must be up and doing. She went over to Whiteburn with her uncle and inspected the farm; she rode to the meet with her aunt, and began a portrait of her on horseback.

It is surprising, clever as Elizabeth was, that she should have remained so long blind to the fact that Mrs William's life was built up of small deceptions as regarded her husband. The first lie the girl detected smote her like a blow in the face. It was a thing of no importance, *as it seemed to her at the time.* Afterwards she remembered that its effect was to prevent her uncle's going to a certain place, on a certain day. He was devoted to his wife, and the least suspicious of men. She, on her side, though bent on amusement, was never unmindful of her husband's comfort, and when she discouraged his accompanying her to a ball, some miles distant, and said she was sure he would be happier remaining at home with Bessie, he regarded it as an instance of her unselfish consideration for him. Elizabeth did not believe that—no. Her eyes had been gradually opened to the possibility of her aunt being actuated by other motives. Admiration was the breath of her nostrils; and though there was no harm in this—for does not every human being enjoy "appreciation," as we call it, by a graceful euphuism?—perhaps Uncle William's presence might render the atmosphere a little heavy; the incense would not rise so freely. Elizabeth had never taken her aunt very seriously; she did not do so now. Mrs. William was a bright butterfly, fluttering through life, without the moral sense of the housewifely bee; but, also, without its sting. Elizabeth was sorry her aunt told white lies—it shook the girl's faith in her: but she ought never to have looked for figs from thistles; and there was no real harm in her uncle's wife, she felt sure.

One day in April Mrs. William announced to her niece

that she had some shopping to do in London, and should be absent two nights. Elizabeth would keep her uncle company; ride with him to the meet, and play backgammon with him after dinner. She added, truly enough, that her husband would be bored to death in London, and annoyed at missing one of the best meets of the year, and he laughingly agreed with her. She went with her maid, and the morning after her departure Mr. Shaw received the following telegram:—

"Colonel Wybrowe just returned. Can come to us for a week. Have asked him to accompany me home to-morrow. Send carriage to meet six-thirty train."

Elizabeth felt a slight thrill of pleasure at the announcement, and was surprised to feel it. What could it signify to her whether this Adonis came to Farley or not? Well, physical beauty had a great attraction for her. Some people said they did not care about it; she never pretended not to care. It would be a pleasure to see again a figure, the image of which often rose up before her eyes as the type of manly vigour and comeliness. Perhaps, if he stayed at Farley some days, she might succeed in making a sketch of his head. As to the man himself, she was not much concerned as to what he was; but, being fresh from Africa, he must have something to tell better worth listening to than the local gossip, and horse-and-dog talk, which was all she ever heard from the men who frequented Farley.

It was dusk when they arrived: Mrs. Shaw flushed, excited, voluble, laden with parcels (one of which was a present of a grey embroidered dress for Elizabeth); Colonel Wybrowe calm and high-bred as ever, curiously

languid for a lion-hunter, and—except that he was bronzed—absolutely unchanged in all respects.

Uncle William, who had just returned from hunting, greeted his guest with great cordiality. He asked a certain number of obvious questions, which Wybrowe answered; but Mrs. Shaw did most of the talking. It was by a happy chance, she said, that she had called at the Traveller's to inquire if Colonel Wybrowe had returned to England, and had found him there, just arrived. He gave her a dinner at the Savoy, and they went to see *The Pink Dominoes*. It was *too* amusing; she had laughed till she was ashamed of herself. She wished Elizabeth could see it, but that was impossible. It was not a play a girl *could* see—it was too improper. Of course, for a married woman of ten years' standing, like herself, it was different; she might see anything with impunity. Here Elizabeth broke in with—

"I once went to a play, when I had to pretend not to understand, for father wanted to take me away. I was curious to see the end, of course, and so I stayed; but I didn't like it."

Mrs. Shaw and Colonel Wybrowe laughed.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Uncle William. "When we are in London, Bessie, we'll go the opera—you'll love *that*."

"I am afraid I shan't," she replied. "All that caterwauling doesn't appeal to me in the very least."

"Perhaps you don't know the *Trovatore*, Miss Shaw?" said Wybrowe (he called it the "Trover-Tory"). "I remember, when I was hunting in Africa, how often I used to hum, 'Non ti scordar di me;'" and he glanced

from one of his fair auditors to the other, as he stood facing them, with his back to the fire.

"I have heard the song; it is pretty, but I don't know what it means. I like to understand the words, and I don't speak Italian."

"Oh, it is an appeal from a fellow in prison to the woman he loves not to forget him. It's awfully touching, I think."

"So do I," responded Mrs. Shaw, warmly. "When the tenor who sings it behind the scenes is good-looking, I always feel choky."

"If he is behind the scenes, I shouldn't think it signified what he is like," said Elizabeth.

"Dear Bessie! you are not sentimental. When I have *once* seen the man, if he is a short, stout, puddingy-looking creature, all the romance is over. He may sing like an angel, he can't affect me."

"Drat that girl!" cried Coco, irrelevantly, from his perch.

"You darling!" laughed Mrs. Shaw. "I'm not the kitchenmaid."

"I am afraid the remark was addressed to me," echoed Elizabeth.

"Molly is such a terrible one for good looks," said Uncle William, slyly, glancing with a smile at the figure opposite him, who leant against the mantelpiece, standing on one leg, and warming the other at the fire. The face was half in light, half in shadow. Elizabeth longed to paint him as he stood there.

But the dressing-gong for dinner sounded; and Mrs. Shaw started up, without replying to her husband's sally.

There were no other guests that evening, which was the pleasantest Elizabeth had known since she came to Farley. Uncle William and Mrs. Shaw between them made Wybrowe recount some of his African experiences. He was not a boastful man, perhaps hardly a fluent talker; but the very absence of art in his narratives rendered them more convincing. He described the dangers to which he had been exposed, and the narrow escape he had once had from a lion, with perfect simplicity. It was impossible to doubt that he had both nerve and courage. The deliberation of his utterance, which almost amounted to a drawl, seemed to Elizabeth to heighten the effect of what he said. It was odd it should do so; but, thinking over it afterwards, in the silence of her own room, she came to the conclusion that, in so big and brave a man, a soft voice and hesitating delivery were distinctly attractive. He might have been loud and self-asserting. Modesty was an unexpected grace in so godlike a looking creature. The fact is, Elizabeth had met but few highly bred men; and Rupert Wybrowe, whatever his defects, was outwardly a perfect gentleman.

The next morning she went, as usual, to her studio (a large north room had been given up to her by Mrs. Shaw for that purpose), and had been painting for some time, when she heard her aunt's voice, and, after a knock at the door, for form's sake, that lady entered, smiling, followed by Wybrowe. She began at once in her high-pitched voice—

"We have come to beard you in your den, Bessie. I have brought the colonel, who is awfully fond of pictures. I think it would be so nice if you'd paint his

portrait. She has done me on horseback. Oh, there it is! Isn't the horse good? I'm not *quite* so dumpy as that; and my nose isn't 'tip-tilted,' is it? That Frenchman who painted me five years ago said my features were classical. '*Vénus en petit*,' he called me. Ha, ha! But, anyway, for a likeness on horseback, I think Bessie's very good. Don't you think he would look splendid in armour, Bessie? A sort of Sir Galahad! There is that fine suit in the hall; suppose we try to get him into that?"

Elizabeth was a little taken aback by this volubility. Certainly she desired nothing better than to paint Colonel Wybrowe's head; but she felt somehow as if the proposition should have come more gradually, and that the sitter should be allowed to express his readiness, if not his desire, to sit. She hesitated for a moment; and seeing that, he said with a smile—

"You are placing Miss Shaw in a painful predicament. Her politeness forbids her to say she had rather not. As to that armour," he added, laughing, "it wouldn't come near me. It is made for a man of five foot six!"

Then she said quickly, "Armour or not, of course I shall be glad to try to paint your head; but—I have never had so difficult a subject. My aunt, you see, is not satisfied with *her* portrait. You must not be vexed if I make a dreadful thing of yours."

"I shall not be vexed—whatever you do, Miss Shaw."

"But if it is only to be the head," struck in Mrs. Shaw, "I am bent on your trying on the breastplate and shoulder-piece. Never mind if they don't meet behind. It will look so much better than a stand-up collar and a tie."

Elizabeth agreed with her aunt. The victim shrugged his broad shoulders; the armour was brought up. He tore off the reprobated collar and tie, and bared his powerful throat, which rose like a bronze column from the pieces of armour, which they adjusted with pack-thread around him. All this was effected with a running accompaniment of laughter from Mrs. Shaw. Elizabeth, happily, had a fresh canvas ready; she began at once her charcoal sketch, when she had decided at which angle the head looked best. Seen at three-quarters, the cast in the eye was hardly perceptible, and the long yellow moustache shaded the somewhat too prominent under lip. The contrast between the steel corselet and his fair hair and beard was certainly becoming; no painter had ever a finer model, Elizabeth thought.

After a time Mrs. Shaw departed, and left them alone. There was not much interchange of words. Wybrowe had not the infirmity of thinking it necessary to "make" conversation; Elizabeth was absorbed in her work. Her sitter was beginning to feel rather sleepy, when the gong for luncheon roused them both. She laid down her palette and brushes.

"How patient you have been, Colonel Wybrowe! I never had such a good sitter. I am so much obliged, for it must be an awful bore."

She came and helped to release him from the armour. Her hands rested on his strong shoulders as she untied the knots of string. He looked down smilingly upon her from his altitude of six feet two.

"It can never be a bore to come and sit with you. I am only sorry that I can stay here so short a time now—

three or four days at the most—not long enough for the portrait to be finished."

"I am very sorry," said the girl. "Perhaps you will return."

"Perhaps."

Something in his tone, in the manner, as he said that one word, made a curious impression on Elizabeth. Was it fancy? It seemed as though that simple rejoinder had been charged with some special meaning.

Mrs. Shaw had to pay a visit of ceremony, a visit of gratified social ambition, some miles distant, that afternoon. A great lady—the greatest, indeed, in the county—who had hitherto ignored Mrs. Shaw, had lately left cards upon her. It was rumoured that this condescension was not wholly unconnected with Elizabeth's appearance at Farley. The duchess had a second son, a clever young man, in Parliament, of whom great things were expected, but he was very poor. The duchess was anxious he should "marry money." This was said with many winks and shakes of the head. Mrs. Shaw had heard the insinuation, but it did not affect the satisfaction afforded by a recognition she had wished and waited for so long. She was now to return the visit in state, but she thought it unnecessary that Elizabeth should accompany her. Uncle William having a Board of Guardians to attend, her niece and Colonel Wybrowe could ride out together; and both acceded to this suggestion. The man, indeed, could hardly do otherwise; the girl was nothing loth.

Elizabeth rode well and fearlessly, and she was mounted on her beloved Bruno, which her father had given her the year before he died. She looked to greater advantage

on horseback than anywhere, and so her companion thought. They galloped across the downs, and hardly spoke a word until they entered a wood of young larch and birch trees, through the burgeoned lilac tips and tender greens of which the pale blue sky of May looked bluer overhead. Her cheek was flushed with the exercise; her dark eyes gleamed. "She looks positively handsome," the soldier said to himself, and his lips were opened. What he uttered is of small account. Thinking over their ride afterwards, Elizabeth could recall no single thing that he had said; but the general effect of his conversation was as a soothing accompaniment played to an admirably devised tableau — the fair stalwart knight upon his white horse, lit by the flickering sunlight through the delicate tracery of boughs; the fleecy clouds, like flocks chasing each other across the blue sky, overhead; the mossy turf, starred with anemones, underfoot. Years afterwards that picture remained painted on her mind unfaded. Subsequent troubles could never efface or injure it. It was a picture—nothing more. It stood in its little frame apart, untouched by any deep feeling, and so unembittered by regret.

Three days passed, much upon this wise. He sat for his portrait each morning, and each afternoon they were together; not always alone, though occasions for their being left so, which could hardly be the result of pure accident, were not infrequent. Elizabeth's work did not progress as rapidly or as satisfactorily as she had hoped. She could not get the modelling of the head right, and the wonderful transparent shadows on the flesh were translated opaquely. She saw it. She had lost the

beauty of colouring; the obliquity of vision seemed intensified; the expression she had caught was a transient one, and unpleasing. There was likeness, but it was the likeness of a cheap photograph. She dashed down her palette and brushes on the fourth morning, the morning of the day on which the colonel was to leave Farley, and cried—

"It is of no use! Vandyck would have painted you, but I can't. It is a daub—a caricature. I shall destroy it!"

"Oh no, you won't," he said quietly. "You must turn its back to the wall, and not look at it till I come back. You will look at it then with a fresh eye."

"You *are* coming back, then?" she asked quickly.

"Your uncle and aunt wish me to do so. Shall I?"

"I shall be very glad," she replied quickly.

He had risen from his chair, and walked a step or two forwards, looking down full into her face before he replied slowly—

"When would you wish me to come?"

The second question might be taken, of course, as still referring to the portrait; and it was as such that she accepted it.

"Oh, I feel *now* as if I never could go on with this beastly thing. But if you are really kind enough to sit again whenever you return, perhaps I might try, or—or begin another head."

"You mustn't destroy that one," he said very softly. "Looking at it by-and-by will bring back such awfully nice recollections of these hours to me, I'm sure."

"To *you?* Oh, but I don't mean you to have it!"

laughed the girl, gaily. "No one wants to look at his own picture."

"Then will you, in return, do me a picture of yourself? If you have mine, it's only fair I should have yours, don't ye know?"

She stared at him. "I could never paint my own portrait." Then she turned away, and deliberately wiped her brushes. "Of course, if you had rather I did not keep yours, it is better I should destroy it," she added, with her back towards him.

"No, you mustn't do that. I am awfully pleased that you should wish to keep my portrait; and if you'll let me sit again, perhaps you'll get on better with it. I may be able to return here in about a fortnight or three weeks."

"Then I will turn its face to the wall, as you suggest, and not look at it till then."

He went away that afternoon. Mrs. Shaw drove him to the station after luncheon, during which the conversation was general; the parrot, from his perch, taking a prominent part in it. Uncle William shook his guest cordially by the hand at parting, and bade him telegraph when he could return to Farley. They were not going to leave home this spring. He might run up for the Derby; but Mrs. Shaw had decided not to take a house in London this season, as her niece had no wish to go into society. If they were inclined in June, they might go to an hotel for a week; but this was uncertain, and in the mean time he hoped to see the colonel again at Farley. Between Elizabeth and him nothing passed but a few commonplace words as they shook hands. Then he

jumped up on the box beside her pretty aunt, who held the reins, and the dog-cart drove rapidly away.

Uncle William stood under the porch, watching them. His pot-hat was at an angle of forty-five degrees over his eyes, his hands were in his capacious breeches' pockets, his pipe was in his mouth. Elizabeth, who stood beside him, slipped her arm within his.

"Come and take a turn in the garden, uncle."

Then, when they were out of earshot, she continued—

"Have you known Colonel Wybrowe long?"

"Well, let me see. It'll be over two years. He came down here to hunt first, three winters ago. A fine man, ain't he?"

"Yes. Was he ever in the Guards?"

"He was, but he had to leave. He ran through a lot of money, I have heard."

"What does he do—besides hunt lions?"

"I don't know. He has a place somewhere, which is let; but it's not worth much."

"But has he no occupation? Doesn't he do anything for a livelihood, if he is poor?"

"No. What could he do? He has enough left to get on, I suppose, somehow."

"Do you think he is a humbug, uncle?"

"A humbug, Bessie? No! What should make you think that? Because he is such a favourite with the ladies? He is a plucky chap, and rides straight; and I never heard aught against him, except that he had been a bit too free with his money—and—and things."

Elizabeth at once turned the conversation into another

channel, and never again asked her uncle any more questions touching her sitter.

But when her uncle left her presently to go to his farm, the girl sat down on a garden-bench and did—what she seldom did—nothing, for more than half an hour. She questioned herself; she questioned the impression that remained with her of the man who had suddenly and unexpectedly begun to engross her thoughts. Was it a monstrous self-delusion, or did this "favourite with all the ladies" show signs of beginning to care for her more than his undemonstrative manner permitted him to show?

The glamour of his personal beauty, of his grand manner and persuasive simplicity, which in its very silence expressed more than the volubility of others, had not been without their effect on the girl, who, with all her cleverness, all her emancipation from the susceptibilities and sentimentalities of her age, was practically ignorant of the world. Except the few youths she had met at Farley, redolent of the stables, and with limited capacities for stirring the female imagination, she knew but little of men under forty. Her father's friends, whom she had seen at home, were all solid business men, well on in middle life. They had been to her as so many stocks and stones; the young Nimrods latterly as so many pebbles on the pathway. But now loomed against her horizon something like a column, the superscription on which she could not read. It puzzled her, not only because of the difficulty in deciphering it, but by reason of the uncertainty she felt in determining her own sentiments with respect to those hieroglyphics.

Was there more than admiration and curiosity? Could she admit to the weakness of a deeper interest built upon such slight knowledge? She said to herself emphatically "no." And yet she was perplexed.

Mrs. Shaw, on her return from the station, learning that Elizabeth was in the garden, followed her there. The little lady's eyes sparkled, and an odd smile crossed her lips, as she came upon her niece seated under a tree, her elbows planted on her knees, her firm chin resting in her hand, her clear dark eyes fixed on the bed of forget-me-nots before her. It was not thus the elder woman was used to see the resolute, active girl, to whom relaxation never meant inaction.

"Well, dear," she began, as she approached, "I saw the colonel safely off. But he was very low—very low indeed. He says he is afraid you don't like him."

Elizabeth flushed. "What nonsense! How could that make him low, aunt? A man like that! Even if it were true—and it is not. I don't know him well enough to—to like him or dislike him."

"Then he need not despair. I shall tell him so. He said if you hated him, perhaps he had better *not* return here. The truth is, he admires you very much, but he wants encouragement. He is proud—and not at all expansive, as you see. He generally takes no notice of girls."

Elizabeth's lip curled sarcastically. "Perhaps he expects them to fall down on their knees before him. I am not going to do so."

"He is not a bit conceited, *really*," returned her aunt, with a smile. "On the contrary, he is almost shy,

until he is quite at his ease in women's society. If he was snubbed, he would make no effort to remove a prejudice. He would let things slide, and—never return."

"As he proposed to do so, that I may finish his portrait, I suppose he does not consider himself snubbed," said Elizabeth, rising, and stooping to gather some forget-me-nots. She placed them in the breast of her black gown; and her aunt, understanding that the girl did not desire to pursue the conversation, turned towards the house, humming a tune as she went.

CHAPTER III.

THE simple plan on which the house at Farley Manor was built may be told in a few words. A broad corridor ran the whole length of the house, out of which the various sitting-rooms on the ground floor opened. On ascending the circular stairs, which were in the centre of the building, a similar corridor led, on the right hand, to the bedrooms of the family, on the left to those of the guests. Elizabeth's spacious studio, her bedroom, and a small dressing-room occupied by her maid, were on one side of this passage; on the other, Mr. and Mrs. Shaw's bedroom, two dressing-rooms, and a bath-room. The circular staircase, lit by a domed skylight, divided these from the guest-chambers, though there was a passage to right and left of the banisters on the landing which united the two portions of the corridor. At the extreme end, next to the door of Elizabeth's room, was a French window, opening upon a stone balcony, which commanded a view of the distant hills and the winding river, and many an old timbered farmhouse down the valley.

Here, early in the morning, at sunset, and by moonlight, Elizabeth often stood, watching the long blue shadows shorten as the sun rose higher, or lengthen as the golden light declined. She seldom went to bed

without stepping out upon the balcony to take counsel of the starlit sky. Could the stone balustrade on which she leaned have told all the girl's thoughts, as they floated over it into the still misty air of daybreak, or the unfathomable spaces of the night, what a strange tissue of faith and fear, of hopes and questionings and doubts, it would have been!

The girl's character was not as yet fully developed. She was still full of inconsistencies—perhaps always would be; but experience might do something to reconcile points in her nature which did not seem to fit into each other. Proud, independent, undemonstrative in manner, she yet responded very quickly to affection. She had grown really fond of her uncle, for whom she felt a certain pity—she hardly knew why. For was he not perfectly happy? Did he ever appear to wish his wife different from what she was? And if she could entirely have believed in her aunt, she would have become attached to her also, little as their natures had in common. The girl's was a curious blending of the romantic with the practical and hardworking. Clever as she was, she was not suspicious—not shrewd; at this time hardly very observant. Certainly few clever girls in her position would not have had their eyes open, after a few months, to Mrs. William Shaw's real character. She was untruthful, and she was always restless for amusement and admiration—so much Elizabeth saw; but her aunt's apparent kindness and invariable good temper hoodwinked the girl, who was still very ignorant of human nature. By none of the indications which would have betrayed the secret to so many could she have discerned

that Mrs. Shaw's light-hearted gaiety concealed a thoroughly depraved nature.

Not that she was bad in the sense of being malevolent; she was only intensely vain, and utterly unprincipled. She had married a man for whom she had no particle of affection, because he could give her the things for which she hungered. Being the man he was, William Shaw exerted no authority over her, and believed all she told him. She amused him; she made his life very comfortable; he enjoyed, in a vicarious way, the admiration she created, especially in the hunting-field; no whisper of evil ever reached him, and his trustful nature was incapable of harbouring a suspicion.

Mrs. Shaw, in her own way, was clever: there are so many ways of being clever. When she saw that Elizabeth's taking up her residence at Farley was inevitable, she resolved to make the best of it. She had already received the girl once, with every demonstration of delight, under her roof; the next thing was to bind Elizabeth to her by ties of gratitude and affection so strong that, having eyes she should not see, and ears she should not hear, whatsoever Mrs. Shaw desired should remain unknown. The task was easier than she anticipated. The cords that bound Elizabeth to her aunt were not, indeed, as "taut" as Mrs. Shaw conceived; but the girl's nature, as I have already said, was slow to suspect evil.

And now the scheme, which (the reader has already divined) had been growing up in a brain that was never affected by conscience, seemed nearly ripe for execution. Colonel Wybrowe was the most attractive of all her adorers. *And he was very poor.* He confided to her, when

they met in London—it was during that dinner at the Savoy—that he was "stone broke," and would have to pass through the Bankruptcy Court shortly. A means of saving her friend occurred to her. Why should he not make up to Elizabeth? Could she do better than bestow herself and her twelve thousand a year on a man for whose person she had expressed such undisguised admiration? He was ruined, and he would find it difficult to pretend that he was in love with her. His tastes lay quite in another direction. But there was his recognized position in the world of fashion; his reputation for strength and courage, and his great personal attraction. With so many advantages, surely he might aspire to the hand of a rather plain, obscure girl, with means to maintain him in all the luxury he had a right to expect?

The suggestion was at first coldly received by the individual it was meant to benefit. He told her he was not a marrying man; he would rather remain free and poor; the obligations of matrimony were distasteful to him. That was all very well, she replied; but how was he going to live? Here was a ready escape from his difficulties. If she could only bring this about (of course it needed his active and strenuous co-operation; there must be no half-measures with such a girl as Elizabeth), it would mean security for the remainder of his life. Her arguments prevailed. Naturally, the moral side of the question remained untouched by either. If *she*—the girl's aunt—had no scruples, no qualms of conscience, why should he be troubled with any? If the girl chose to marry him, well—it was *her* look-out. He should

always behave as a gentleman towards her. If she didn't expect too much, they might "get along" pretty well.

Such reasoning as this prompted Wybrowe to take the initiatory steps we have recorded in his quest for money —with the drawback of a wife attached thereto. It cannot be said that these steps were vigorous or decisive; still they were steps, not too sudden or violent to be out of character with his *poco-curante* manner and demeanour. Elizabeth was slow to believe whither those steps tended. But she thought a great deal about her sitter during the next three weeks. His face too often obtruded itself between herself and her work. It irritated her. She wondered why it was that his rare smile and certain tones of his voice haunted her with a pertinacity which nothing else had ever yet done. Was she to be dominated by a man's looks and manner, of whom she knew so little, and that little by no means to his advantage? She had always said she despised men who did not work—who treated life as a playground, and wasted their energies on football, so to speak. Here was one who had done nothing but play football, and an expensive game it had been. She could not honour such a man; to be consistent, she should reprobate him. And whenever she said this, the noble head, pale and reproachful as Banquo's ghost, rose up before her.

Colonel Wybrowe had daily interviews with either lawyers, money-lenders, or creditors, during the weeks that he passed in London, before returning to Farley. For this purpose he had gone up—to temporize; to explain that if matters were not forced to a crisis, if a little patience were exercised, he had good hope, at no

distant period, of being able to pay twenty shillings in the pound. The creditors took counsel. It oozed out (through the ex-Guardsman's indirect instrumentality, no doubt) that there was an heiress in the wind. They agreed to wait a few weeks before taking him into the Bankruptcy Court.

It was still early in June, when Mrs. Shaw announced one morning at breakfast, after opening her letters, that Colonel Wybrowe would arrive that day. It was Whitsuntide, and other guests were also expected; the house, which was not large, would be full. It was the first party they had had since Anthony's death, more than six months ago.

"Well, I'm glad Wybrowe can come," said William Shaw, heartily, in spite of the drawback that his mouth was full of devilled kidney; "for he's such a favourite with the women, that the girls who are coming will be pleased —eh, Molly?"

"Oh! as to that," replied his wife, glancing at Elizabeth with a meaning smile, "he seldom condescends to talk to girls. I don't suppose he'll say six words to Kate Wargrave, or Guendoline Palliser, handsome as she is. He is so very odd!"

"Then what men have you got for 'em—eh?"

"Lord Robert Elton is coming. I don't know him, but the duchess asked us to Colesover, and as neither you nor Elizabeth would go, I had to decline. So I thought the best thing was to ask the son here, and he accepted."

"I'm glad of it. I hear him very well spoken of; and he's the right side of the House, and a first-rate speaker, I'm told. Any one else?"

"There is Captain Drayson."

"Who the deuce is Captain Drayson? I never heard of him. You are always inventing new men, Molly."

"You forget, William; we met him in the winter out hunting several times. And I had known him before in London. He is in the —th, and quartered at Manchester."

"Ah! well, you've a better memory than I have. Then there's General Palliser and Lady Wargrave—that makes ten. You haven't any more, I *hope?*"

"No; the house won't hold any more. I wish you would build a wing, William—a nice large room for dancing below, and some bedrooms above."

"Can't afford it, Molly. I live up to every penny of my income as it is."

Generous Elizabeth was on the point of saying, "Let me build the wing for you," when the sober good sense of her uncle's next speech stopped her.

"And it ain't the building only, you see, but a larger house means more expense; and I don't want large parties, and balls, and all that. It ain't worth it. Ten's a very good number. A couple of whist-tables, and two to play piquet or bezique—what d'ye want more?"

"Don't put too much sugar in!" a voice called out from the bay window. Coco's perch was always placed there at breakfast-time.

His mistress went up to him, laughing, with a lump in her hand.

"*You* don't mind how much one puts in, you spoilt pet!" Then turning to her husband, "Oh! it is as you like, dear," said Mrs. Shaw, with her sweetest manner. "I wouldn't, for the world, have you do anything you

don't like, merely to please *me*. Only, if Elizabeth doesn't marry next year"—here she laughed again, and cast another meaning glance towards her niece—"we really *must* give a ball, or something, to introduce her to the county."

Elizabeth interposed resolutely.

"Certainly not, aunt. If you think of doing anything of the sort, I shall go away. Uncle William isn't to be bothered on my account. I don't want balls, and I can get on very well without knowing all the county."

"Well," said her aunt, who had just opened and read another letter which the post had brought, "if you don't want to know all the county, the Head and Front of the county wants to know *you*. Here is a second invitation from the duchess to Colesover Castle! She says they are to have a dance there on the 20th. It is too amusing! She has never taken the least notice of me till now. *You* are the attraction, Bessie."

"Nonsense, aunt! How can you talk so?"

"But it's true, my dear. She wants you for Lord Robert. Well, we shall see what he is like. I'm told he is horribly ugly; but *that*," she added, with her ringing little laugh, "is of course of no importance with such a lot of brains, and the noble blood of the Eltons. It can't signify how ugly and misshapen he is!" Then turning to the placid William, she continued, "Shall I fetch Colonel Wybrowe from the station, or will you? He comes earlier than the rest, for whom, of course, you will send the omnibus."

The reply she knew beforehand. Had she not known it, she would not have asked the question.

"You'd better go, Molly. I have something to do at the farm."

And she went. That half-hour's colloquy placed her in possession of, if not all, at least some of, the facts environing her friend's position. No time was to be lost. He must now set to work in earnest, and use the opportunities he had with skill and determination. The presence of other guests during the week—notably such a foil in physical respects as Lord Robert Elton—far from being a drawback, was held to be advantageous to his suit.

CHAPTER IV.

LORD ROBERT was neither very ugly nor misshapen. Yet, standing beside Colonel Wybrowe that evening, the contrast was disastrous to the former. His sandy head reached to the ex-Guardsman's shoulder. His own shoulders were narrow; he wore a *pince-nez*, and had an upper lip of inordinate length, which he sought ineffectually to clothe with a sparse brushwood. It had the effect of a few hairs from his eyebrows which had got accidentally displaced. His features were not amiss; but he had a way of snapping at his words, and, when caught, holding them as it were in a vice between his thin lips, apparently afraid that they would escape again. His manner, though abrupt, and his voice were those of a perfect gentleman; but they were without charm. And yet he talked well; too well, some people thought. As a debater, he was said to possess great argumentative ability. Perhaps he was too ready to employ this gift to be very popular. Men were apt to call him "a prig;" women did not find him light in hand. He was not much more conceited, and was unquestionably cleverer, than most young men of his standing; and yet socially he was a failure. Why? No one could say exactly. He was kind, though dictatorial, and had many high and

good qualities; but these do not always make for fascination. If he had low as well as lofty ambitions, he was hardly to be blamed for that. He had been taught from the schoolroom upwards that it was a duty, a necessity, for him to marry an heiress. And as obstinacy was the keynote of his character, it was certain that, supposing he set his mind upon doing a certain thing, he would leave no stone unturned to accomplish it.

"You have not been long in the county?" he said to Elizabeth, as he sat down on the sofa beside her that evening. "Do you like it as a residence?"

"I prefer my own; but the riding here is better."

"Yes—grass country. About us, particularly open. A few miles distant, I will show you our downs, when you come to us on the 20th. I hope you *are* coming?"

"I am still in mourning, and not going anywhere at present."

"My mother will be sorry. She and my father wished so much to make your acquaintance. Not a large party. Little dance one night—that's all. I never dance myself. You paint, I think? We have some pictures at Colesover would interest you."

"I have heard of the Reynoldses and Gainsboroughs there, and hope I may see them some day."

"I hope so, indeed. I am fond of pictures myself. Should have painted, if I had had time. Public life prevents that. Have you studied—from the life?"

"Not seriously—not as I should like. I hope to go to Paris later, and work there."

"Why not London? Can you not get as good models and as good teaching there? This talk about Paris is all

nonsense. Are you aware that modern French landscape is entirely founded on our Constable and Bonington? As to portraiture, what man have they had within the last hundred and fifty years to compare with Sir Joshua or Gainsborough?"

"I dare say none. That does not prevent their school-training from being, as I am told, superior to ours."

He did not argue further on this head, but said suddenly and swiftly—

"When shall you go to Paris?"

"Oh! I have not thought about it yet. I go on at present working like a mole, in the dark, at whatever I can find."

"Will you let me see to-morrow what you are doing?"

"I don't think I can. I am very much dissatisfied. It is a head of Colonel Wybrowe, but it is horrid."

"Artists themselves are the worst judges. Sir Thomas Lawrence began my grandfather, and left it half finished, dissatisfied. It is one of the cleverest things he ever painted." Then, with another of the rapid changes which were characteristic of his talk, "Do you care about politics? Do you ever come and listen to the debates?"

"I have never been to London for more than a day. And if I were there, I should not go to hear the debates. I know nothing of politics."

"That is a pity. Do you read much? Are you fond of history?"

"Yes; but I care more for past than present history. When time has mellowed events, I prefer them to looking at them in all their horrid crudeness."

He laughed. "I see. Pictorial, even in this. I like facts before they are varnished. Life can offer a man no greater interest, I consider, than to have a hand in the making of history."

She began to regard him with some faint curiosity. He might be mercenary, as Mrs. Shaw suggested; he might be a number of bad things, besides possessing a frightful upper lip. But, at least, he was no *fainéant;* at least, he was made of a very different paste from most of the young men who flocked around her aunt in the hunting-field, and dropped in afterwards to drink curaçoa. Of course, the peerless Wybrowe was different. He did not do much now, it is true; but he had been a soldier; he had hunted lions in Africa; and so splendid a piece of humanity could not be judged by ordinary rules. No comparison between Lord Robert and *him* was possible. But Lord Robert, as an intellectual study, held her attention. He was better worth it than any number of Captain Draysons.

That gallant officer was devoting himself to the handsome Miss Palliser, from whom he had been separated at dinner, and who had vainly endeavoured to "make some running" with Lord Robert, seated between her and their hostess. He snapped at the beauty politely, after his fashion, but it was very clear that his ears, like his eyes, were more occupied with the heiress opposite. Miss Palliser was not used to be so treated; she turned round, and delivered herself over to the flirtaceous mercy of General Wargrave on her other side. But the elderly lady-killer was only employed as a stop-gap. Now, after dinner, she and Drayson were deep in conversation upon

a distant sofa. Which digression is needed to understand the continuation of Lord Robert's dialogue with Elizabeth.

"You must come to London," he was saying, in his slightly dictatorial, but yet perfectly well-bred way; "you really must come, before the session is over, and have tea with me on the terrace—or, better still, dinner some evening when we expect a good debate. I think I could make a convert of you."

Elizabeth smiled. "You had better try with Miss Palliser. I suspect she would be more easily converted. She would probably know many of the speakers. I know no one."

"You would know *me*. And the knowledge of your presence would fire me to speak my very best. Miss Palliser's presence would have no effect on me whatever—any more than a bust of Venus would."

"Are you not an admirer of beauty? What a loss for you!"

"Not beauty of that kind—rule-and-measure beauty. I like expression—character."

Colonel Wybrowe was playing at bezique a little distance off. The lamplight fell on his classic profile—the one that did not show the cast in his eye. He was animated; he smiled at his antagonist; his fingers played with his fair moustache. Elizabeth, with her small knowledge of mankind, was foolish enough to say—

"There can be regularity of feature and expression also, as in Colonel Wybrowe's head."

"Humph! You are painting him? Know the nickname I gave him?—'The Splendid Shilling.' Read the

old poem so called? The name fits him rather well. So magnificent, and worth so little!"

"His poverty does not affect *me*."

"Oh, if it were only his poverty—if it were only his pockets that are empty! Puts all his goods in his front-shop window—'In this style six and nine!' The sort of material I detest. But no man is a judge of another man's looks—never ask for his opinion."

"I did not. I expressed my own."

He gave his little dry laugh, which was more like a bark. "You have me there. One man has no business to speak of another. You are very sharp."

A smile played round the corners of her mouth. "I suppose a woman had need be. But I don't *cut*."

"There are wounds which are not intentional; you have the capacity of inflicting such." This, with a little complimentary bow, was his nearest approach to a piece of polite flummery. Then, like a snap-shot, "Shall you ride to morrow? I will wire to Colesover for my horse—come by train."

"I think not to-morrow. I shall be painting all the morning, and in the afternoon some people are coming here for lawn-tennis."

The following morning Elizabeth was seated before the half-finished portrait, which she had just placed on the easel. And the splendid Wybrowe, armour and all, was in his old pose, a few yards from her.

"It is very bad—very bad indeed," she said. "But I see where I was wrong now; before I only saw it was horrid. Your advice was good."

"It always is, if you will only think so. Is Lord Robert Elton coming up here?"

"Not this morning."

"I am glad of that. The fellow gets on my nerves."

"He shall not come while you are sitting," she replied demurely, as she prepared her palette. "I will have him all to myself. He knows something about painting. Perhaps *he*, too, can give me some advice."

"He is sure to offer it. Such a very superior person! So good-looking, too," he added, twirling his moustache.

"Please put your hand down. Do you know what he said to me yesterday?—that one man ought not to speak of another."

"That was probably after he had given some fellow one in the eye."

It was sharp of him to have divined that. She could not deny it, so changed the conversation.

"Talking of good looks, how beautiful Miss Palliser is! I never saw such colouring. I want to paint her."

"She has done that for herself."

"I should not have expected such a nasty ill-natured speech from you. It is not true. Her colouring is quite natural."

"You are very innocent, Miss Shaw. However, it is all one to me. I hate pink cheeks and golden hair. It is so cheap. I prefer dark eyes and a clear olive complexion."

"You are bound to say that, because you are fair yourself," she returned, unmoved. "Your head a little more to the right. I am going to begin."

There was silence for some minutes. Then he said slowly—

"Do you like Drayson? I was horribly jealous of his sitting next you at dinner last night."

"He hardly spoke to me," laughed Elizabeth, colouring with pleasure. "He talked chiefly to my aunt. He seems good-natured."

"He is an awful outsider. I positively refuse to sit next to Miss Wargrave to-night. She interferes with my digestion."

"How delicate it must be! I should have thought you would have got on so well together, both so much in London society."

"Get *on?* The difficulty is to get *off*. She chokes me. I don't want to hear all that stale London gossip over again down here. I'm sick of it at the clubs. I like something fresher."

"Can nobody be fresh who lives in London?"

"She can hardly be as fresh as you are."

"Fresh is another term for *green*, isn't it? My aunt says I am much too 'unconventional.'"

"Don't believe her. It is as good as a pick-me-up to hear you."

Elizabeth laughed. "Some people think I am 'knock-me-down.'"

"Don't believe 'em," he repeated. Then, after a long pause, "Isn't it a pity that I didn't live three or four hundred years ago?"

"Why? You know I should not have been able to paint you if you had."

"I could have done something then, I suppose. I could have fought in the lists for my lady. But now—what is the use of being big and strong? I can't write books,

or spout on the hustings, like Robert Elton. I kill pheasants in England, and lions in Africa. It is a waste of good material."

"Brains can be wasted as well as muscle, if it comes to that."

"I have no brains. I have a heart—that is all, besides my arms and legs."

"Why did you leave the Guards?"

"I have just told you—because I am a fool. If I had brains, and *no* heart, I should not have made such a mess of my life as I have."

This certainly invited a rejoinder, but again Elizabeth was silent. Her brush was not very steady, as she touched the golden lights upon the beard in the portrait before her; but this her sitter could not see. After a moment's pause he continued—

"Perhaps you are wondering how I have made a fool of myself?"

There was no pause now. She cut him short at once.

"No, I am not. I know you have lost a lot of money."

"Yes," he proceeded, in his soft monotone, and his right eye turned slowly towards her as he spoke. "But that is not the worst. The heart had nothing to do with *that*—only folly. But now, because I am such a duffer, I have fallen in love with an angel, who is quite indifferent—indeed, blind—to my devotion. Idiotic, isn't it, Miss Shaw?"

"Very." She caught the glance of that right eye. "Turn your head rather more to the left, please."

"Won't you say you pity me? You're awfully unkind."

No doubt, to a cold looker-on, there would have seemed

something absurd in this big superfine gentleman, with his healthy appetite, and his supreme indifference to the outer world, craving a girl's pity. But his listener was young, and she was not cold.

"I should pity—if I believed you. But somehow I—I really can't!"

"What can I do to make you? It is very hard. I never was more serious in all my life. I know I've been an ass. I know every one thinks me a bad lot. But, with your help, what a different man I should be! What a different life I should lead!"

Elizabeth gave a little strained laugh. She was resolved not to take her sitter seriously.

"The idea of a girl of my age helping a man of yours, who—who knows the world as you do! What nonsense!"

"You think so, just because you *are* so young, and know nothing of—of—things. No battered woman of the world could do for me what you could do, with your freshness—and—and all that, you know."

"Please turn a little more away. And your breastplate has slipped down—that's it. You really must not talk so much, Colonel Wybrowe. You lose the *pose*, and I can't paint if you do. Now, just a quarter of an hour more, and then I'll let you off for to-day."

Some such dialogue as this, with variations, was repeated every morning that week. The Wargrave ladies and Miss Palliser sniffed. It was a very odd proceeding—very unconventional, indeed—for a girl to be shut up alone with a man, and such a man as Colonel Wybrowe, for an hour and a half every morning, while she painted his portrait. She had said, to be sure, after the first

morning, that any one could come to the studio who liked, provided he or she did not attempt to look at the portrait. But the invitation had been given with little cordiality, and Mrs. Shaw had declared, in so many words, that it was much better to leave them undisturbed.

As a matter of fact, Lord Robert came once, by himself; but he was called away from Farley on parliamentary business most unexpectedly, and to his infinite disgust, the second day after his arrival. His only *tête-à-tête* with Elizabeth was when he visited her studio. He stood with folded arms opposite Wybrowe's portrait, and said—

"You don't mean to tell me you did that alone? It is wonderfully good for—a young lady! Flattered, of course—very much flattered. You have got rid of that villainous left eye."

"This is the right side of the face—in profile."

"Yes. Clever of you to have done that."

"I think the slight blemish of no importance whatever; but no two profiles are exactly alike, and I preferred this one."

"Exactly. You have looked at the 'Splendid Shilling' the right side up. You must now go to the South Kensington or Slade School. Paris all nonsense. Are you still obdurate about coming to Colesover on the 20th?"

"I cannot, thank you, this summer."

"Then your uncle must bring you to London. I shall tell him so."

"I believe it is decided we are not to go."

"I shall make old Twisden—you know him?—your uncle's solicitor as well as ours—I shall make him invent

some business to bring Mr. Shaw to London. You'll accompany him—you must."

She shook her head. He held out his hand, and so they parted.

She did not dislike his company. He knew about things. He rather amused her. If she had not heard of his set mercenary intentions in coming to Farley, and if Wybrowe had not been there, she would have regretted his departure. As it was, she was glad. The "Splendid Shilling"—Lord Robert had so impudently called him—had it all his own way henceforward, unhindered by a sneer. Lord Robert had, indeed, repeated the nickname to Miss Wargrave, who declared it was the cleverest thing she had ever heard, and took care it should go round the house. Mrs. Shaw heard it, and was indignant. Elizabeth turned a silent, scornful lip: the second-hand sarcasm had not the effect of cauterizing the wound this destroyer of domestic peace had effected. Lady Wargrave was very loud in condemnation.

Of course it was easy to see what it all meant. The colonel was a ruined man—a man whom no *nice* girl would look at—and he was bent upon marrying this heiress. It was very shocking. She really ought to be warned. But it is difficult with some people to arrive at the stage of intimacy when warning becomes possible; and Elizabeth was of the number. Besides, there were her aunt and uncle, her natural protectors, who were evidently bent on this match. In the face of such obstacles how could the most meddlesome of gossips interfere?

As to the men, General Palliser was dull and cautious.

He would have extremely regretted seeing his handsome daughter attracted by a man who had nothing but his looks to recommend him; but if the young heiress chose so to bestow herself, it was no business of his. Shaw had as much opportunity of learning what Wybrowe's reputation was as any other man. If he received him as a friend—and it was evident that Wybrowe's intimacy at Farley was of long standing—it could be no concern of the general's. Jack Drayson, on the other hand, was a good-humoured rattle. He was conscious that the magnificent Wybrowe looked on him as "an outsider;" but he had no designs himself on Miss Shaw's fortune, and his motto was "Live and let live." He tried to be sentimental with Miss Palliser; Miss Wargrave and he chaffed each other; Mrs. Shaw and he filled odd half-hours with flirtation. Why should he spoil sport by talking about Wybrowe?

Mrs. Shaw's conduct, as a hostess, was irreproachable. Whatever she may have done in strict privacy, in public she always sacrificed herself to her guests. It was to this that she owed her popularity with other women. Jack Drayson was often peremptorily ordered from her side to make himself pleasant to one of the other ladies, while Mrs. Shaw permitted herself to be bored by General Palliser or Lady Wargrave. Elizabeth, on the other hand, possessed neither patience nor tact. No wonder, then, that none of the cakes and ale which Society allots to those who serve her as amiably as did Mrs. Shaw, fell to her niece's share. She was ticketed as a very "odd" young person; brusque at times, absolutely silent at others, and really quite *too* unconventional! Why, she

actually deplored never having been to a life-school of painting, with opportunity for drawing from the nude! And she spoke of this openly, before the men at dinner! It was all very well to be artistic, but one must draw the line somewhere. The line which was *not* to be drawn by a girl, apparently, was an anatomically correct one.

She was still in deep mourning, and wore the same dress every evening. This was an additional cause for the absence of sympathy between her and the other women: she could not talk *chiffons*. The reduced size of sleeves left her absolutely unmoved; and her dark hair—strong and stubborn—was swept back, regardless of curling-tongs. What could be said to a girl so blind and deaf to the edicts of Society? Pretty, dainty Mrs. Shaw was always so charmingly dressed, and not a hair out of its place upon her sunny little head. How strange she could not inoculate her niece with some of the *virus* necessary to preserve the female form from the contagion of a virulent commonness!

At the end of the week, these people, with most of whom we have nothing further to do, departed. Their impression of the new heiress and of her delightful aunt are only worth noting inasmuch as they helped to colour public opinion upon subsequent events.

Colonel Wybrowe stayed on.

CHAPTER V.

THE portrait was finished. Elizabeth still scowled at it, but confessed she could do no more. Of its defects few could be more conscious than she. The uncritical visitors to the studio, however, one and all, declared that "there never was such a likeness!" This was not complimentary to the colonel, and it made the artist, by what seemed to be strange perversity, really angry. He was much handsomer than she had represented him, and the expression which had insisted on appearing on the canvas was not one she wished to see, and which, in point of fact, she rarely did see. How it came about that she had perpetuated it, she could not tell. She had been slow to believe in him; but now he had succeeded in blinding her, as a less clever, but more vigilant worldly-minded girl would not have been blinded. She had defended her outworks bravely, but she felt them yielding. The citadel was being undermined further day by day. And yet she had seen and reproduced that cruel, merciless look which flashed now and again from his stone-blue eye! But the man had begun to exercise a fascination over her, against which instinct and reason were alike powerless. That gratified vanity had more to say to this than she recognized, is probable. Had she valued money more—had she thought

about it at all, indeed—the danger of her position would have been apparent to her. She had been told, with tolerable distinctness, that Lord Robert Elton sought her because she was rich. Therefore she believed it. But to suspect the man who had declared that he ought to have lived three hundred years ago—the brave lion-hunter, the object of assiduous pursuit on the part of so many women—to suspect this paladin of sordidness, never crossed Elizabeth's mind. It is humiliating to have to show that my heroine was a fool: let her youth and her ignorance of the world plead in extenuation of her folly.

June was more than half over, but there was no great heat as yet. The fields were literally "a cloth of gold" with buttercups, through which lovers could still wander at midday, unafeared of the sun's power. The long soft days, indeed, sometimes melted into rain, and the air which was heavy with the scent of roses, always became damp at twilight. The nightingales had ceased singing; but the thrushes and blackbirds still called to each other from the thickets and fruit-trees at sunrise, so that they often woke Elizabeth through her open window. If she was not feeling sleepy, she sometimes arose, and stepped upon the balcony to watch the dewy mists of dawn drunk up in the growing glory of the apricot-coloured sky; and as the evening twilight gathered over the garden, it was here that in those days she often communed with her heart. Outside it, what counsel had she? None.

One day Uncle William, impelled thereto by his wife, began—

"Your aunt says Wybrowe is mightily smitten with you, my dear. What are you going to say to him, if

he asks you—eh? With your fortune, you mustn't be throwing yourself away. Still, he's a fine-looking fellow, and thought a deal of. And there's his future title. He'll be Sir Rupert when his uncle dies. That's something, I suppose. You might do worse."

"To marry a man because he will some day have a title, and is six foot two, uncle, would not be wise," said Elizabeth, with a smile; "but I like Colonel Wybrowe—yes, I confess I like him better than any one I have ever seen. I don't know why. He is not very clever, and I am afraid he is not very good; but he is very brave, and very handsome; and though it is foolish, I suppose, to care about looks, I *do* care. I confess he attracts me, but I can't believe that he cares the least about *me*. If I did—if I could feel sure that this was not a passing fancy, perhaps—I think—yes, I—I *think* I would marry him."

"Well, Bessie," returned her uncle, staring with a puzzled look into vacancy, "as to not being good, young men *will* be young men. They're all of 'em much alike. You won't get a saint, my dear, not if you waited till—till you were fifty. I dare say he is no worse than the rest of 'em, and 'll settle down all right by-and-by. He has run through most of his fortune, I believe; but you'll have enough for both—and Twisden 'd see that it was strictly tied up—settled on yourself. He couldn't make ducks and drakes of the principal."

A little later in the same day Mrs. Shaw found occasion to say to her niece—

"He is in despair. He says he is afraid you don't care for him, and talks of emigrating. He won't marry this Miss Krupp, the American heiress with half a million,

who has almost offered herself to him (it is too extraordinary what women *will* do !). He says he would rather do anything than sell himself. He is so high-minded!"

"Don't you think he is mistaken, aunt, in fancying that he cares about me? That is the thing."

"He does nothing but talk about you, my dear. It is quite fatiguing."

Elizabeth shook her head. "I should be wretched, if I married him, to find, by-and-by, that he had been mistaken; to see him attracted by other women, and to know that my influence over him was gone. I should be jealously hungry for my husband's love. No divided empire would satisfy me."

"All of which means that you are already a little bit in love, Bessie;" and Mrs. Shaw laughed lightly, though she avoided her niece's searching eyes.

"I don't know. Perhaps it does. Sometimes I think it does. I have seen so little of men that I scarcely know if what I feel at present for Colonel Wybrowe is love or not. But I believe I could grow to care for him—*really* to care, I mean—if I felt sure about him—quite sure."

"He cannot hang on here for ever," said Mrs. Shaw, with a little sharpness of tone. "It is not fair to him, and it would be still more unfair to you. It would naturally keep other men away. Lord Robert would have proposed if he had not been called away; but you know very well what *that* means. I am very glad he came, that you might contrast the two. Such a dried-up piece of humanity! Those two girls were just dying of envy of you for capturing Colonel Wybrowe; that is

why they were so ill-natured. But they have gone away, and spread the report abroad that you are to be married to Colonel Wybrowe; so if you have made up your mind not to have him, he had much better go, and not waste his time and make himself miserable for nothing."

"I have not made up my mind."

"Well, will you do so, Bessie, by the end of the week?"

There was a long pause before she replied, "I will."

It was growing dark when Mrs. Shaw left her and tripped into the smoking-room. She looked round; Colonel Wybrowe was alone.

She came up close to where he sat, in an armchair near the window, a cigar in his mouth, reading the *Sporting Gazette*. He dropped it, and looked up inquiringly into her face. Her hand played with his fair beard for a moment.

"It will be all right," she whispered, as she stooped over him, and pressed her lips to his.

Then she turned and ran lightly out of the room. The first gong for dinner had just sounded.

Mrs. Shaw, with a fine instinct for the best conditions of love-making, had some of the neighbours every day to dinner. How could Wybrowe and the object of his pursuit enjoy a *tête-à-tête* with no one present but Uncle William and herself? A little party of eight or ten enabled the society to break up into couples, and wander about the garden and shrubberies by the clear starlight which shone upon Farley all that week. On the night in question, the rector, with his wife and two other

neighbours, dined there. Elizabeth had a cordial regard for the old pastor, but he did not combine the wisdom of the serpent with the innocency of the dove; he was not a man to whom to appeal for advice in any emergency which demanded worldly perspicacity and knowledge of character. Still, when he said to her, "Is it true that we are soon to lose you? Am I premature in offering you my congratulations?" she replied gravely, "Yes, Mr. Newton; you *are* premature. Ought a woman to marry a man who asks her, if she likes him, without—without any other considerations?"

"If there is nothing against him, my dear Miss Shaw, what other consideration should weigh? Love is such a purifier, such a strength against trouble and temptation! A good woman may prove such a safeguard to her husband! The man who wishes to win you, I am told, is distinguished for his strength and bravery. He may become a soldier of Christ by-and-by, under good influence."

"I am afraid I am not good *enough*."

"Ah! my dear, pray for guidance, and love will do the rest. Love is so potent. If this strong man loves you, do not be afraid."

The rector's premises being built on sand, the structure he erected was dangerous, and liable to crush whomsoever trusted to it. Nor can it be said that Elizabeth did so wholly. Yet his words weighed with her. Looking back afterwards to the indecision of that night, she felt that she had been influenced, more than she had known at the time, by the faith of the guileless old man. He was the very embodiment of charity, that "thinketh no evil."

He was as unsuspicious of sordid motives, after seventy years' contact with the world, as Elizabeth herself. But his world had been a narrow one; a sleepy hollow, a round of dozy virtues, and small fretful sins. Of the great iniquity so near at hand, his knowledge of life had given him no premonition.

An hour later, that same evening, under the jasmine bower at the end of the garden, but faintly lifted from darkness by the stream of lamplight out of the open drawing-room window, Colonel Wybrowe definitely asked Elizabeth to be his wife.

"Are you sure you are not mistaken?" she said, in a low, hesitating voice. "I have heard that men so often are. If you had met me in London—if you could compare me with many other girls—girls in society, who know all the things of which I am so ignorant—perhaps you would change your mind. You might see me then with different eyes."

"I shall never see you otherwise than as I do now, Elizabeth"—he, too, dropped his voice to almost a whisper. "You are awfully sweet and clever, and there is no girl in London, I am sure, to compare with you; no other girl I have ever seen that I would marry. You're not narrow-minded, and all that. You understand me, and will make allowances; you won't expect to find me a model of all the virtues—will you?"

"No; I do not expect to find you that."

His strong arm encircled her; he stooped and kissed her brow. She did not free herself; she did not resist. She looked up into the handsome, dimly lit face that bent over her. She continued, after a pause—

"But I have a strange secret fear that you are deceiving yourself about me. I am of a jealous, passionate nature. If I gave you my whole heart, and you deserted me, I should not take it as, I believe, some wives do. I should be desperate. I should be capable of committing a crime. I know I could never sit down with folded hands, and submit. Think well before you take me, and be very *sure*."

"I *am* very sure," he murmured, and sealed his asseveration with another kiss. Perhaps it was well for him that the light was so dim: she might have detected that look in his eyes which so rarely revealed the soul within him, and which might have ratified her dread.

She had no doubt, at that moment, but that she really loved him. Many another woman, as clever as Elizabeth, has been thus self-deceived. The man's physical attraction was great; and leaning there against him, with his strong arm round her, she believed in him as she had never believed in him before.

It was some minutes before she spoke. Then, in a very low voice, she said—

"It has been so difficult to think this possible. What can you, who have known so many, see in me? But I know you are the soul of honour and manliness, whatever faults you may have. Brave men are always true. You would not say all you have said to me if you were not sure—would you?"

"Certainly not, dear. Why should I? You are the first woman to whom I have ever proposed—the first for whom I have felt ready to sacrifice my independence. Of course I have been a loose fish, and have got debts,

and so on. You know that. I don't want to make myself out better than I am. But when we are married, I mean to turn over a new leaf. You'll help me."

Which was true in a more literal sense than he wished her to understand.

They wandered away from the light, through the shadowy garden, where the roses, touched with dew, seemed to breathe their benisons on her as she slowly passed, his arm around her, his golden beard pressed against her dark hair when he bent over her. King Charles's Wain was riven as with bolts of gold into the blue heaven above them; a little nearer the horizon of the hills a great planet had arisen; the sky was light, though there was no moon. How happy she was—or fancied that she was—during that short half-hour! She had put away doubt; she had forgotten everything till the stable clock struck eleven, and the sound of wheels upon the carriage drive told that the first guests had departed.

"I had no idea it was so late!" cried Elizabeth, aghast. "We must go in, or they will all be gone to bed."

But the rector was still there, when they entered the drawing-room, and greeted her with his benevolent smile. The blood suffused her cheek; she looked beautiful in her happiness at that moment. With the simple directness which characterized her, she went up to him and placed her hand in his. It was needless for her to speak: he understood her.

"Good night to you, my dear young lady," he said in a low voice. "May this prove to be a good night to you in your life! And may the peace of God be yours!"

CHAPTER VI.

ELIZABETH'S dream of happiness was short-lived. For many a long day she was not to feel again the perfect security of that first starlit hour, when she promised to be Rupert Wybrowe's wife. Before she went to bed that night her uncle had shaken her by both hands warmly, and kissed her on the forehead. Her aunt had overwhelmed her with caresses, and little shattered peals of laughter. Wybrowe had received his congratulations calmly, as he did everything; but there was a gleam of triumph in his eye. On the whole, he played his part well; he did not overact the rapturous lover. The silent lofty man did not "protest too much" in the home circle. And his betrothed listened, and was satisfied.

Nevertheless, she passed an almost sleepless night, and her nerves the next day were abnormally sensitive and watchful. Now and again Rupert disappointed her. That he was undemonstrative by nature, she knew; but she looked for a readier response, a quicker apprehension of her meaning or wishes, above all, an impatient desire for uninterrupted *tête-à-têtes*, which he did not evince. He was more charming than ever, in some respects; in lighter spirits, and telling his lion-hunting adventures

with such verve! His grand courtesy never swerved; increased intimacy did not cause it to deflect by a hair's breadth. He looked handsome and happy. Yes, he certainly looked happy, Elizabeth said to herself twenty times a day. And if his temperament was so different from hers, ought she to complain? Was it not better that the waves of her passionate nature should break against a cold, strong rock, than meet a counter-current of equal force, with no sustaining power?

She tried to argue with herself thus; but as the days went by, her doubts, her sense of something wanting to perfect happiness in her relations to the man whose wife she had promised to be, increased. She blamed herself for this at times. But then, again, there were times when she felt more than misgiving—a sick apprehension that both of them had been under a delusion. Was her feeling for this man really love? He had thrown a glamour over her, which she had found impossible to resist, when he had persuaded her of the sincerity of his devotion. But had he not deceived himself? She watched more keenly than ever every casual glance, every intonation of his voice. And once she intercepted a look between her aunt and him which startled her. What did it mean? It was gone in a moment, and she never saw it repeated. Yet it left an uncomfortable impression.

On the third morning after Elizabeth's engagement, Uncle William had announced that business would call him to Birmingham the following day, and had added that if Bessie would consent to the marriage taking place at once, he would go on to London, and interview

Twisden, the family solicitor, with respect to the settlements. It is needless to say that Mrs. Shaw had suggested this proposal. Rupert had twice approached the subject with Elizabeth, urging his impatience to be made a happy man, and each time had been put off with the declaration that she did not wish to be married while still in deep mourning. She now told her uncle more emphatically that she would not be married till the autumn. He need not go to London; there was plenty of time to see Mr. Twisden later in the summer. This announcement was received with great dissatisfaction by Wybrowe, and with scarcely controlled annoyance by Mrs. Shaw. It was tempered, indeed, when Elizabeth added that she did not see why Mr. Twisden should not come to Farley for a night, instead of her uncle journeying to London. The business might be very quickly concluded. She wished to settle half her fortune on her husband. There was a dead silence. Uncle William coughed, indeed; but he said nothing. This was so much beyond what the bridegroom-elect had dared expect, that it almost outweighed the annoyance, and possible danger, of the delay. Could he temporize yet further with his creditors? And, if driven to extremity, could he ask her to pay his debts before marriage, without imperilling his position?

After murmuring his desire to leave Elizabeth entirely free to settle her money as she thought fit, he rose and left the room; but not before Polly, from the window, called out with asperity, "Keep stirring!"

Mrs. Shaw and Elizabeth both laughed. Then there was a pause. Uncle William cleared his throat.

"With respect, you know, Bessie, to what you said just now about your fortune, I couldn't, as your guardian and trustee, consent to *that*. When you come of age you'll have uncontrolled power over certain property—which ain't in the trust-fund. That you can do what you like with, but not now. Even if I have the power to do it, I know Twisden would advise me not."

Mrs. Shaw observed that solicitors were only consulted, she supposed, as to the legality of certain acts, not as to their advisability.

To which her husband responded, "Well, Bessie will be of age, any way, in little more than a couple of years, and then my responsibility ends, and she can do as she pleases about the money that ain't in trust. As to the rest, well—we'll see——"

"Uncle," struck in Elizabeth, wishing to change the current of the conversation, "how many days shall you be in Birmingham?"

"I'm afraid I shall be kept three, at least. So I'm not sorry, Bessie, to be spared going to London, for we begin to make our hay o' Monday, and I should like to be home for that, ye see."

"Of course, uncle; it's much better you should."

"And then I wouldn't like to be away too long while Wybrowe is here. Molly says he won't mind being left here with *you*"—he looked mighty sly, and chuckled, as he said this—"else I wouldn't have asked him to stay on. It don't seem very civil to run away from a guest, and I wouldn't do it if I wasn't obliged—but——"

"My dear Bill! don't distress yourself about the colonel. I assure you he will do very well without you.

Elizabeth and I will look after him, and see that he has your best cigars, and the '64 claret, and all the rest of the things that make a man contented. So don't bother about him, you dear old man!"

Mrs. Shaw laughed merrily as she said this, and still more so when Polly from her perch called out, "Don't put in too much sugar!" and put her head knowingly on one side.

"Oh, you wicked Polly! to cry out that I put in too much sugar!"—and Mrs. Shaw scratched the bird's head with her small white fingers. "And how rude of you to tell the colonel to 'keep stirring'! I wish you had been better brought up, Polly. But, for all that, you are a great dear—you are! you are!"

And Mrs. Shaw stooped and kissed the bird's grey poll before she whisked out of the room.

The remainder of that day Elizabeth passed in the unsatisfied condition of mind I have already indicated. If she could only feel sure that he really loved her—that this was more than a passing "fancy" on the part of this magnificent spoiled child—what a devoted wife she could be! He had faults, of course—perhaps very grave faults; but so long as they did not touch *her*, what did she care? Such is the supreme egoism of love, or what passes for love, which is so often justly punished. That one half of her—the less worthy half—was at times subjugated by this man, there is no doubt. But her strong passionate nature was not without restraint. Education of the higher sort had done much to elevate and to balance her character during the past two years. She was still impulsive; she would always be so; acting

with rapidity where doubt did not enter into her decisions. But here doubt had entered. Both needed longer probation. She therefore resisted the attempt to hurry on the one irrevocable act, which both might ultimately deplore. She saw how eager he was that a definite time for the marriage should be fixed. She saw that her aunt, and consequently her uncle, would urge on her a speedy decision in the matter. But no—she would not be driven. And so nothing further was said upon the subject that day or the next.

In the morning Uncle William departed, with injunctions on Mrs. Shaw's part to write to her daily, and to be sure and wire if he found he could return sooner than he expected. The parrot from the open drawing-room window invited him to "keep stirring," which excited his mistress's mirth as much as if she had never heard that culinary injunction from the bird's mouth before. Elizabeth kissed her uncle and bade him good-bye, with a strange foreboding, which she remembered long afterwards.

It was the first very hot day that summer, and the three who were left at Farley spent it entirely out-of-doors, lying on rugs and cushions under the beech trees in the morning, and strolling down to the river later, where Wybrowe fished, while the ladies made tea upon the bank. It was not the sort of day that spurs talk; even Mrs. Shaw was somnolent, and the fisherman naturally flogged the stream in silence. Elizabeth did not feel drowsy, but she was glad of the perfect stillness, as they lay under the slanting shadows of the trees at sundown. How pretty her aunt looked in her white

dress, leaning, half asleep, with her back against the green bank, the open volume of "Mensonges" on her lap! If anything could have kept her wide awake, no doubt that would; but the long silken lashes closed over the china-blue eyes from time to time, the lids fluttered, the eyes opened only to close again, the book dropped from her hand—she was asleep. Elizabeth arose, and went down to the water's edge, close to Rupert.

"How patient you are!" she said. Then added, with a smile, "I should not have expected it of you."

"They are beginning to bite. I have had two nibbles."

"And you have been here more than two hours! That would never satisfy *me*."

"I am afraid you are hard to satisfy. As long as the fish rise, a fisherman never despairs. He may have the wrong fly, but he knows there's something ready to be caught."

"I think I am more like the fish than the fisherman. It is all a question of the fly with me. You used the right one, I suppose—only——"

"Hush! I've got a bite," he whispered. "Speak low, or you'll frighten him away. By Jove! I've hooked him; and he must weigh five pound if he weighs an ounce. He is going to give me some play. Look out! He's tugging at me like grim death. Stand a little back."

And Rupert was so absorbed in the difficult operation of landing his fish, that he thought no more of Elizabeth for the moment. She walked away, up the bank and out of sight, into the wood. She should have watched to see how the fish dragged its skilful captor many yards down the stream, until, exhausted with its struggle, it

gave up the fight, and Rupert landed it on the bank, just opposite to where Mrs. Shaw lay. But the girl was hurt —unjustifiably so, perhaps. She had wished to say something to him, and he had stopped her. He had actually stopped her, when she was about to say something which he ought to have been keen to hear. He had stopped her, in order to secure a fish!

Her cheek burned as her feet trod the soft green sward, in the twilight of the trees. Surely this man could not really love her? Every true lover hung upon his mistress's words. Was it ever told of one yet that he preferred landing a fish to listening when his betrothed was about to unburthen her heart—to speak openly to him of all her perplexities? But she would do so to-morrow. Yes, she was resolved that she would speak very openly to him to-morrow. Perhaps they had both been mistaken. If so, it was far better that the engagement should be at an end.

At this point in her reflections she turned, and retraced her steps over the velvet moss. The trees hid her until she was close upon them—her aunt wide awake now, and looking up laughing, he standing over her, a smile of perplexity on his handsome face as he stroked his fair moustache.

"What shall I do? Shall I go after her?" were the words she heard.

"Of course, *mon cher*," replied Mrs. Shaw. "Go at once. She requires as much play as that fish; and if you don't look out, you won't land *her* as cleverly."

No assiduity on his part during the remainder of that

evening could wipe away the effect of those few words overheard. He might make himself charming, as he alone knew how, when he chose; but had he not been told that she *was difficult to land?* They were in league against her. And one part of the truth slowly, reluctantly, dawned on her mind. It must be for her money that he sought her. It was a horrible suspicion, and doubly so when associated with the idea of her aunt's co-operation. She had never thoroughly responded to Mrs. Shaw's affection, but she had never questioned it. Her aunt's kindness had been invariable. What could be her motive for encouraging, if not instigating, this marriage? Was it the ambition to be allied to a man highly connected, and prominent in the world of fashion? It was sickening. Her aunt was so shallow, so frivolous, that she could not be expected to take other than a superficial view of marriage. But that she should allude to it, in this case, as the prospect of Elizabeth's being "landed," rankled in the girl's breast. She would certainly speak very openly to-morrow morning, not only to Rupert, but to Mrs. Shaw. She would not be "landed." The hook which had been adroitly slipped into her foolish heart should be extracted. If she did not actually break off the engagement, she would at least insist on a much longer term of probation than she had contemplated.

They sat out in the verandah, he and she, in the hot darkness—there were no stars visible to-night, and the air was heavy with thunder—while Mrs. Shaw played waltzes in the drawing-room, which, borne through the open window, were a pleasant accompaniment to his

persuasive monologue. She said but little; she listened. He abstained from overt love-making; instinct told him that she was not in the mood to imbibe the poison. But he must exert himself to entertain her; and he did. They could not see each other's faces; the burning end of his cigar, as he moved it to and fro, in the intervals of speech, was the only light that played upon the silhouette of his head, lying back in the wicker chair.

How often, afterwards, the picture, the very tones of the man whom she saw that night, "as in a glass, darkly," returned to her! She remembered the spell of his voice, struggling to reassert its ascendency over her half-awakened consciousness; she heard the sentimental, sensual swing of that Viennese waltz, delicately touched, in the distance. And then at last the piano was shut, and Mrs. Shaw rang the bell, after which she came out into the verandah.

"I think it is time, Bessie, that *we* went to bed. We will leave the colonel to his cigars and his B. and S. I wish I could sit up half the night, but I can't. I am quite prostrate with the heat—ain't you?"

Elizabeth remembered also, afterwards, how her aunt had kissed her, when they bade each other good night in the corridor which divided their rooms; and how, when she returned the salutation, she had said—

"I must have a long talk with you, aunty, to-morrow."

And then they parted.

Elizabeth's room felt stifling as she entered it, although the window leading on to the balcony stood wide open. The faint odour of a cigar rose from the verandah below. She never kept her little maid up; she was independent

of all services, and began slowly to undress herself. The hands, now and again, fell listless, and once she rested her burning head between them, for some minutes, on the dressing-table. Then she heard a little movement in the verandah below—a door being closed and bolted; after which all was silence. She generally read before going to bed, but not to-night. She was restless and feverish, and walked up and down her room for some time. After that, throwing her white *peignoir* round her, she stepped out upon the balcony. The night was so black that even the outline of the elms against the sky was indistinguishable. It was scarcely cooler here than in her bedroom, but she could breathe better. There was space and utter darkness, and a silence broken only by the rumble of a storm far away among the hills. She felt disinclined to go to bed. Her mind was on the full stretch; incapable of oblivion. Atmospheric influences, no doubt, tended to aggravate her condition. Her heart was sore troubled, her thoughts tossed to and fro on a sea of perplexity.

Once a dog barked in the stable-yard, and once she heard the cry of the night-jay. There was no other sound but the distant roll of thunder at long intervals. The house had been still certainly for more than an hour, when a faint glimmer of light, streaming through the open window of the corridor next to her own, attracted her attention. By shifting her position a yard or two on the balcony where she stood, and leaning forward, she could look down the whole length of the broad passage, which ran, as I have said, from one end of the house to the other. A figure was gliding

towards her—a figure she recognized at once—clad in a dressing-gown, and in his hand a lighted taper. His neck was bare; the collar of his silk shirt thrown back, his naked feet thrust into soft slippers that fell noiseless on the carpet as he stole along.

Elizabeth's heart beat violently. He was still some distance from the window, and she was prepared to return precipitately, thinking he was coming on to the balcony, when he stopped at a door on the opposite side of the passage, and opening it softly, entered.

It was the door of Mrs. Shaw's bedroom.

* * * * * *

How long Elizabeth remained there, she never knew. She was conscious, after a time, of staggering back into her room, half-stunned, and of flinging herself upon her bed. She could not be said to *feel* anything. The unutterable horror of what had thus accidentally come to her knowledge seemed to have turned her to stone. An abyss of depravity, such as she had never dreamt of, yawned at her feet. The cruelty, the hypocrisy, the conspiracy, of the guilty couple—she understood it all, as her mind slowly regained its equilibrium. She had been their dupe. As to the man, no words were strong enough to tell his baseness—his vile, sordid treachery. And she, who said she stood in the light of a mother towards Elizabeth—her depravity was, if possible, worse. Instead of a protectress, she had done her best to sacrifice the girl committed to her charge. In order to enrich her lover, and to keep him near her, Mrs. Shaw had plotted this devilish scheme. Her niece's life would be ruined—but what of that?

And Uncle William,—poor, kind, deluded Uncle William! The tears, for the first time, welled into her eyes as she thought of him—so good and so deceived. She was powerless to help him. She could help herself, but him she could not help. She knew that from the first. Of course, nothing should induce her to remain here. She would flee to the uttermost parts of the earth, from this sink of iniquity, but she could not take him with her. She sat up; she tried to arrange her thoughts, her plan of action. And as her self-possession returned, the scheme by which she might escape undetected, and without fear of being followed, slowly formed and perfected itself.

The dawn had broken, and the stable clock struck four soon afterwards. The storm had swept away; in the east the pale gold sky was untroubled with clouds; the birds were twittering to each other in the thick-leaved boughs; a cock crowed from the poultry-yard. Elizabeth was completely dressed; she had been arranging some papers, and securing the few jewels which had been her mother's, about her person. She now looked at the time-table of trains. The first to London passed at eight, and it was half an hour's drive to the station. She had three hours before her. The post arrived at Farley very early, and as Elizabeth often rode soon after six on these summer mornings, she sometimes unlocked the bag herself. She determined that, in order to give a colour to her action, an imaginary letter should cause her to order the dog-cart, which was to take her and her maid to the station. The maid would, indeed, be worse than useless in the life she had resolved on

pursuing; but, for the moment, it was important to avoid the appearance of flight, and the maid could be discharged in London. By this means she would be halfway there before Mrs. Shaw, who never breakfasted till ten, came downstairs. The letter which Elizabeth now sat down to write was to be placed upon the breakfast-table. It ran as follows:—

"When you learn that I have left your roof, never to return, you will at once understand the only cause that could have led me to take such a step. From this day forward you and I are strangers. I pray to God that my uncle's heart may not be broken by a knowledge of your wickedness. The enclosed, which I leave open that you may read, is the explanation I choose to give, and which I desire you to adopt, of my conduct. You will observe that I have taken the whole blame of this parting on myself. E. S."

In the same cover was another letter, unsealed, addressed to William Shaw.

"My dear Uncle" (it began),

"I am, as you know, a hot-headed girl, and I am also very obstinate. I have broken my engagement. The breach between Colonel Wybrowe and me is irreparable. I will never willingly see him again. I know now that he only wanted to marry me for my money. Nothing that you or any one else can say would persuade me to the contrary. And, as I desire to avoid all discussion—in fact, never to hear the

subject named again—I have, after a violent quarrel with my aunt, resolved to quit your roof, and lead an independent life. I am afraid you will think me not only headstrong, but ungrateful. I assure you I am not. And do not be the least uneasy about me. I have my own very definite views about life—the life that it will best suit me to lead—a life in which there is no love-making, nor false protestations of devotion. Mr. Twisden will know where I am, but he will be under a solemn promise not to give my address to any one, and I entreat you to abstain from any attempt to follow me. It would be quite useless. My life will be a very retired one for some years, and for that I have, as you know, ample means at my command. You and Mr. Twisden will continue to manage my affairs.

"Believe me, my dear uncle, in spite of my seeming heartlessness in leaving Farley without other farewell than this,

"Your really attached niece,

"ELIZABETH."

Before sealing the large envelope which contained these letters, the girl got up and unlocked the door of the studio, which opened into her bedroom. The early morning light fell on the portrait of Rupert Wybrowe, as it stood near the window. For a few seconds she remained irresolute on the threshold; then, taking a penknife from her pocket, she walked deliberately up to the picture and cut it into shreds. She looked round to see if there was anything she should take with her, but deciding that the fewer impediments she had on

her journey the better, she left the room, so full of painful memories to her now, and locking it once more, dropped the small key into the envelope addressed to Mrs. Shaw.

She called her maid in the adjoining room a little before six o'clock. The girl was surprised to see her mistress already dressed, and when she entered, to find Elizabeth sorting the clothes she meant to take from those that were to be left behind.

"Go down and see if the post-bag is come, Jane. I am expecting a letter which may oblige me to go to London by the early train."

Oddly enough, there *was* a letter. Elizabeth had so few correspondents, that she opened this with surprise; yet more so when she found that it might (by a strained interpretation) be called the very summons her imagination had devised. Mr. Joshua Twisden wrote, in consequence of her uncle's letter, received the previous day, to express his regret that he would be quite unable to go down to Farley, or, indeed, to leave London for many weeks, being confined to the house by a bad fall, which necessitated complete rest. He could, indeed, send his nephew, Mr. George Daintree, to take Miss Shaw's instructions; but he should much prefer seeing her himself, as one of her trustees, and her late father's intimate friend, before any marriage settlements were drawn up. If, therefore, Miss Shaw could make it convenient to come to London any day, and would wire to him, he would keep the hour she appointed free.

"Tell my groom to have the dog-cart ready at half-past seven; then choose a couple of boxes—whatever

will go best on the cart—and my travelling-bag, and have them brought here."

Being in mourning, she had few dresses to choose from, and as she desired to be burthened with as little as possible, she took no evening frocks, which she knew would be superfluous. A certain grey embroidered gown would have been light and useful in this summer dust, but she would not even touch it. She shut the wardrobe on it sharply, and left lying in the open drawer a string of small pearls which her aunt had given her last Christmas.

A few souvenirs of her happy school-days, one or two favourite books, a sketch of her old home, some studies of her horse Bruno, and of her dogs,—she threw them into the boxes, which were plentifully large for her needs. The maid, seeing that her mistress left more than half her clothes behind, was satisfied to take for herself only what she would require for a few days.

Elizabeth gulped down the coffee and rolls they brought her. She had one more thing to do—the only thing that cost her a pang. She descended the stair with a firm tread, and passed the open drawing-room, where the maids were sweeping, and where Coco from his cage was calling out, "Drat that girl!" The bird was connected with *her*. Elizabeth shuddered, as she said to herself she could never tolerate a parrot again. She passed by, and out of the hall door, and on to the stable-yard. There was nothing in the house that she ever wished to see again; she could not leave Farley without bidding her old horse farewell. She went into his stall, and laid her cheek against his soft nose, and stroked his silken crest.

"How much better are the beasts of the field than men!" she murmured. "Treachery and falsehood are unknown to *them*."

* * * * * *

A few minutes later the dog-cart was flying through the lanes. It bore the embittered girl away from the house which had sheltered her since her father's death, nine months before. And she left it with loathing.

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Joshua Twisden was hardly dressed that morning, in the room adjoining his office, when he received a telegram—

Will be with you at three o'clock to-day.—Elizabeth Shaw."

And at this hour, having deposited her luggage with her maid at the Midland Hotel, and swallowed a hasty lunch, Elizabeth appeared at Gray's Inn. Business had called George Daintree away this afternoon, and it was one of the clerks who received and ushered her into the inner room, where Mr. Twisden sat. His right foot, in splinters, rested on a stool. He made an effort to rise, but she stopped him, putting both her hands in his.

"You must not treat me as a stranger, dear Mr Twisden. My father often spoke of you, and used to say you were his best friend, so that I feel as if I knew you well, instead of only having seen you once. You mustn't treat me with formality, therefore."

"My dear young lady," said the old man, with a glow of pleasure on his shrewd, kindly face, "it is a great satisfaction to know that you feel disposed to accord me the same confidence—I may say the same regard—

your excellent father did. I had the truest respect and friendship for him. He was a fine specimen of a man."

"He was—he was, Mr. Twisden. I believe, at this moment, I should think all mankind vile if I did not remember him."

He looked at her keenly from under his shaggy grey eyebrows. What did this portend? He cleared his throat, and said slowly—

"You are too young to be a pessimist; but you can't think of your father too highly. You may depend on it that, as his daughter, you will always find a true friend in me. I am glad you have come, and alone. I can talk to you more freely than if your uncle or any one were with you. He tells me you are engaged to be married, and——"

"That engagement is at an end, Mr. Twisden."

"Indeed?" He paused. "Well, I cannot say I am sorry to hear it. You are full young to marry."

They exchanged swift glances, like the clash of two rapiers crossing. Then she said quickly—

"Have you any other reason for being glad?"

"If you will tell me first whether your affections were very deeply engaged in this affair, I will answer your question."

"My affections were not deeply engaged. I may have thought so for a few hours. I was mistaken, like many another idiot. My only feeling for Colonel Wybrowe now is—abhorrence."

"I may then speak freely. I have heard a good deal about the gentleman, and nothing to his credit. When I learnt of your engagement I was distressed, and cast

about in my mind how I could warn you as to the character of Colonel Wybrowe. Your uncle wrote of him as his 'friend.' It was difficult to tell him *all* I had heard of his friend, and I knew my communication would be regarded as an impertinence by Mrs. Shaw, who exercises, I am aware, so great an influence over him. Still, I felt it to be my duty, as your poor father's friend, to write to your uncle; but I had so little confidence in my letter being of any avail, that I also wrote to you direct, asking for this interview. As one of your trustees, of course I should take good care that your money was carefully tied up *now;* but I feared, if this marriage was to take place, that you might be induced to sign a promise to pay the colonel's debts when you came into the sole control of your property."

"You may dismiss that fear." The girl smiled bitterly for a moment. "I have other things to talk to you about, that more nearly affect my future. I left Farley this morning, unknown to my uncle—unknown to any one. In short, the truth is, I have escaped from my uncle's house, never to return."

There was a pause, before he said slowly—

"Why? Not because you have broken your engagement?"

"Do not ask me why, Mr. Twisden. I cannot tell you. It is enough that I can never return. The past is past. I want to put it away from my mind as much as possible, and you must help me. Not by your counsel —no, by your *help*. I have taken a horror of my life, and everything belonging to it, at Farley. The only thing for me is to get rid of it all—to have such a

complete change of interests and surroundings as may enable me *to forget.* I want to work hard at painting. I have always wanted this ever since I was a child, and I can do so nowhere so well as in Paris. Then, not a soul knows me there. I can lead my own life, unmolested —which I couldn't do in London."

"But," interrupted the old solicitor, "whom are you going with?"

"No one."

"Then who are you going *to?* You don't mean to tell me you propose living in Paris all alone?"

"I shall go into a 'pension.'"

"You surely mean to take a maid with you?"

"Oh, that would spoil it all! I want to be unknown; above all, that the fact of my disgusting fortune, which has brought me such misery already, should be unknown. If I had a maid, you know very well this could never be the case."

"Does your uncle know of this project?"

"Certainly not—at present. You will have to break it to him, later."

"But he is your guardian. If only for form's sake, you must consult—— Well, if you prefer it, you must *tell* him of your determination. You cannot leave his house, and run off abroad, without a word."

"The case is exceptional," said the girl, looking at him straight in the face, "and must be treated exceptionally. I can't see my uncle. I can't tell him why I leave his house—why I escape from England. I come to you because you were my father's friend, and he told me to trust you. I need not have come. I could have gone

straight abroad, and I doubt if my uncle would have set detectives to track me. No, he will rest satisfied if you tell him that I am safe, and that he had better humour my whim of living in obscurity for a time. Perhaps, some day, I must return to live at my own home, Whiteburn; but not at present. I want to work hard, and be unknown for some years."

Mr. Twisden looked perplexed. He drummed his fingers on the writing-table for a minute or two, before he said—

"You place me in a very awkward position, my dear Miss Shaw. I am anxious to do all I can to help you. But do you not see that your uncle may very reasonably come down upon me for not instantly telegraphing to him that you are here, having left his roof, and that you are about to quit the country?"

"My uncle is absent from home. The telegram will be opened by his wife, *and it will not be forwarded.* She will keep back the fact of my departure till he returns, to-morrow or next day—by which time I shall be in Paris. I have written to him, saying I should come to you; and that you would know where I was, but that I desired it to be a secret. I think he will be satisfied—that he will not urge you to reveal it. Indeed, you must promise me not to do so, otherwise I should not write to you, as I intend to do, from time to time."

The old lawyer shook his head. "I think you misjudge your uncle. Mr. William Shaw is not clever; he is not a man of much decision of character—too easily influenced by others, I apprehend; but I cannot believe he would relinquish the responsibilities of his guardianship so lightly."

Elizabeth bit her lips. "Mr. Twisden, I must speak plainly. It will be the interest of those who *can* influence him to prevent his following me, or making any other inquiries than through you. He will be reminded that I was always a strange, erratic, wilful girl, and that to attempt to coerce me would only cause an open scandal. Write to him by all means—I wish you to do so. You will find that he is only too ready to allow his responsibility to devolve upon you."

"But—but I am not sure that I am ready to undertake the responsibility. It is really not a matter to be settled in this offhand way. If you were going with a—a sort of duenna, or aged companion, it would be different; but, at your age, to fly off to Paris, alone—no, my dear Miss Shaw, pray think better of it. I cannot be party to such a thing—I cannot, indeed."

"Then you will deprive me of the comfort of writing to you—that is all. You will snap the one link with the past for some years to come."

"But do pray think of how the world will regard such an unheard-of step!"

"The world need know nothing of it. I have left Farley. I am visiting, or I have gone abroad. That is all they need learn."

Mr. Twisden looked really distressed. "Take your maid with you. Do oblige me so far. Let me be able to tell your uncle *that*. When you have settled where you will live, you can send her back, if you insist on the strange fancy of being unknown; but, at least, let her travel with you, and remain with you until you are settled in some respectable house."

Elizabeth shook her head, and would probably have remained obdurate, had he not laid his hand upon hers, and added—

"Remember, I knew your father so well, my dear young lady; I am so very sure of what his wishes would have been in such a case. I do not ask what your motives are for taking this extraordinary step. But since you are resolved to take it, let it be done so as to give as little cause for scandal as possible. If you dismiss your maid now, what will be the result? She will return to Farley, and the news of your going abroad by yourself will be all over the county in a week. In Paris it will be easy to devise some pretext for dismissing her, with a handsome present. Her boxes can be sent from Farley here, so that she need not return there, and be tempted to gossip."

"Very well"—Elizabeth was always rapid in her decisions—"to satisfy you, I will take the girl with me, and keep her until I have decided where I will live. I shall then send her home, and no one but you must know where I am. I shall let the girl believe that I am going to travel with friends. And if I promise to write to you once a month, Mr. Twisden, you, on your part, must promise to divulge my address to no one?"

A smile flitted across his face. "You have me in such a corner, I have no choice in the matter. I must submit to your conditions, I see, or not hear from you at all."

"Yes; you must submit to my conditions, because I wish to be independent of every one."

"But is there no alternative to this sudden resolve of yours? An excellent, high-principled, and able young

man of high degree was speaking of you to me most warmly a few days ago."

"Oh! you mean Lord Robert Elton. Tell him I am ruined, and see how warmly he would speak of me then! They are all alike, Mr. Twisden—all alike."

"No, they are not all alike. The duke and duchess are anxious for their son to marry, and he must marry money: that is true. But unless they approved of you——"

"They have never seen me!"

"They have heard much of you, and were anxious Lord Robert should know you, and judge for himself. He has done so. He said to me, 'I have never seen any girl who attracted me so much. If she had not a penny I should say the same; but I should know then it was impossible to make her my wife.' It *is* possible, and I mean to leave no stone unturned to enable me to succeed."

"You must not help him to turn that stone, Mr. Twisden. Lord Robert is not—never can be—the solution of my difficulty. I don't want to marry. If an angel were to descend in man's shape at this moment, I would not marry him!" she said vehemently.

The old lawyer smiled. "I should not expect an angel to be much in your line. But Lord Robert is not an angel. He is an upright and able man, sure to make his mark in public life, and well-calculated, as far as I can judge, to make a woman happy."

"Oh, I dare say! That depends on the woman. He wouldn't make *me* happy. No man ever will, Mr. Twisden. I am never going to fall in love, or *fancy* that I am in love, again. I should like to get away from

all men. I should like to go off to the desert, and live quite alone, if it were not for my painting. That keeps me to the cities. But I must live there in obscurity. Do you understand?"

"Not exactly; but still, I see your present mood. I hope heartily it will soon pass. At your age one recovers from *any* shock, if one has health and a well-balanced mind. You certainly have *one;* you should, as your father's child, have the other."

"I am afraid I have not," said Elizabeth, rising, and pushing back the hair from her pale face. "I hope it may regain its balance; at present all seems weighed down to one side—deep in the trough of the sea! Good-bye. Write to my uncle. Say all you can to tranquillize him. I am not so mad as I seem. Tell him that. You shall hear from me as soon as ever I am settled."

She shook his hand warmly, passed swiftly through the outer office, and downstairs, without observing the face of the young man who made way for her to pass him.

She with her maid took the mail-train to Paris that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE young man whom Elizabeth had brushed by walked straight into Mr. Joshua Twisden's room, after hanging up his hat in the outer office.

"Was not that Miss Shaw who passed me on the stairs?" he asked, as he entered.

"Yes," said Mr. Twisden, leaning back in his chair. He had arranged that, as his nephew was out of the way, he would not mention the visit he had received at present, but now——

"About her marriage?" pursued George Daintree.

"The engagement is broken off."

"Broken off?"

"Yes; and I am heartily glad of it."

"Why was it broken off. Do you know?"

The old solicitor, leaning on his elbows, tapped the points of his fingers together with diplomatic *finesse*.

"I suppose because Miss Shaw found she did not care enough for the man."

His nephew eyed him keenly. "Why should she have come herself to tell you this—and alone? Couldn't her uncle have written to say it was all off?"

Joshua Twisden had implicit confidence in his nephew's tact and discretion. How much of the interview with

Miss Shaw was it expedient he should reveal? Of course, the secret of her wild scheme—a scheme he believed she would never carry out—he was bound to keep. But her flight from Farley, and the rupture with her uncle and aunt, were facts which George might learn at any moment. Perhaps it might be better to give him som · inkling of the truth, so far as he *knew* it. The truth, as he *suspected* it, was another matter. He was not wholly ignorant of Mrs. William Shaw's proclivities, and he had a general conception of Colonel Wybrowe's character.

He pursed up his mouth, and kept on tapping the points of his fingers gently together, as he stared out of the open window at the grimy face of the old-fashioned houses opposite. He could not see the fair, florid young man's face, who was watching him closely, because George's back was against the window-shutter, and the sunlight did no more than touch the edges of his auburn hair.

"William Shaw does not yet know of his niece's decision," said Mr. Twisden, slowly, after a long pause; "nor of her coming here. She has left his house. So much I may tell you. Into the cause of all this it is not my business to inquire. I am not her guardian. I can only say that I am glad, at any cost, that her marriage with Colonel Wybrowe is at an end—and for ever."

Clever George pondered. What did he mean by *at any cost?* But George knew his uncle too well to probe further.

"Probably she found out that he wanted to marry her for her money," he said.

"Just so. And I have an idea that she will not easily be caught again. She will want to be very sure that the man loves *her*, and not her money-bags, before she accepts him."

"Very wise. 'A burnt child dreads the fire,'" laughed the young man. "I suppose Mr. Shaw will write to you about it?"

"He will probably come and see me. But the matter is at an end—definitely at an end. Do you dine with me to-night?"

"Certainly, if you like it. What did the doctor say to your leg to-day?"

"That I was much better, and that he hoped, in a few days, I might stand the jolting of a cab, and go backwards and forwards to my own house. The confinement to these three rooms in this weather is a trial. I shall be the better for Hampstead air again."

"When you do get home, you must take a little holiday, and not come here every day; but let me do more of your work."

"No, my dear boy, you must take a holiday yourself as soon as I can get about. It must be uncommonly dull for you here with me; and you have been very good. I don't know what I should have done without you."

"Oh, I'll get a holiday by-and-by. As long as I am of use to you here, I am quite contented to remain," returned his nephew.

They dined together at eight, and neither Miss Shaw nor her affairs were alluded to throughout the evening. At ten o'clock, after a game of piquet with his uncle, George bade him good night, and strolled into the

"Holborn" for half an hour. The songs he heard did not transport him with merriment, but, after a while, he drew out a note-book, and made some rapid sketches of two or three of the performers—suggestions, drawn with few and vigorous touches, and showing a rare aptitude for seizing character rather than a delicate perception of beauty. After that he strolled home to his lodging, in Jermyn Street; and the refrain of his thoughts was—"*at any cost.*" What did it mean? He should not rest satisfied till he had discovered. The subject of Elizabeth Shaw and her exceptional position had interested the young man ever since the day he first saw her in his uncle's office, and had learnt so much concerning her and her father. There was something about the girl's appearance that fascinated him, though he had never spoken to her. He had been struck at once by her free, erect carriage, her fine dark eyes, a certain unconventionality of demeanour, so little resembling that of the middle-class young ladies whom he knew. Also, to be quite frank, the knowledge that she was a great heiress was a potent and distinct attraction to a man of George's astuteness, ambition, and invincible perseverance. Like most of us, he was a tangled skein of good and evil; but the white threads were uppermost. His good temper was patent to all. His self-sacrifice in ministering to his uncle's comfort was known to Joshua Twisden's many friends. His kind actions to humbler men, his diligence, his exactitude, were fruitful subjects for eulogy when George Daintree's name was mentioned. Half a lifetime of intimacy might have failed—unless the occasion served—to detect the convolutions of dark thread which

it will be our business to disentangle. Temptation, however, at this moment had not come to him, and speculation did not keep him awake, when he turned into bed, and buried his rosy face in the pillow, the picture of healthy oblivion and placid strength.

There was no sign of life from Farley Manor all next day, but early in the succeeding one a telegram arrived from William Shaw, followed a few hours later by the appearance of the harassed gentleman himself. His wife had done her uttermost to prevent his going to London; but there were limits even to her influence and powers of persuasion.

He had found her alone, and in tears, when he had returned from Birmingham the previous evening. Her task of explanation had been difficult—could not be wholly satisfactory. Elizabeth was said to be "violent and self-willed." She had quarrelled first with "poor Colonel Wybrowe" (who, of course, had departed before William Shaw's return), afterwards with her aunt, and had left her guardian's house surreptitiously with her maid in the early morning.

"It is quite useless—worse than useless—to follow her," Mrs. Shaw added. "It will only make her more obstinate. Of course she is safe—she is much too clever to get into trouble—and Mr. Twisden will let you know where she is. If she *will* live apart, you can't force her to return here; and I must confess, after her conduct, I should not like her to return. I do not think you should ask me to receive her."

All which was specious, yet failed to carry conviction to the thick but honest head of William Shaw that it

was not his duty to track the misguided girl committed to his care, and try to bring her to reason. Mrs. Shaw failed, for the first time since her marriage, in making her husband see with her eyes, or at least in producing such paralysis of the mental optic nerve as enabled her to lead him where she saw fit.

"She's my ward, Molly," he kept repeating. "You see, that's where it is. I shouldn't be doing my duty by Anthony's child if I let her go off like this, without trying to stop her."

Alarmed guilt prompted the suggestion that Elizabeth was not quite right in her head. But then astuteness pointed out that this would be the most potent argument in determining William to follow his fugitive niece. And at length, having tried tears and supplication in vain, Mrs. Shaw saw herself compelled to allow her husband to depart, which she did with nervous apprehension and irritability. She had seldom—very seldom—in her life been left alone. And now she was absolutely alone, unable to confide in any one, even her pliant spouse failing her in this moment of peril. Truly her state of mind was not enviable.

George Daintree was alone in the outer office when his uncle's visitor appeared that afternoon. He had read Shaw's telegram, and had taken the precaution to send the junior clerk out on an errand shortly before the hour at which he knew Shaw might be expected. When the country gentleman entered, whose face George had never seen otherwise than rubicund and expressionless, and which now looked careworn and flabby, he rose, and the two men shook hands.

"Your uncle is disengaged?"

"Yes; he is there, and expecting you."

With that he showed William Shaw into the inner room, and, while appearing to shut the door, left a crack of it open. The old solicitor grasped his visitor's hand without rising, and, pointing to a chair opposite to him, began at once.

"I knew you would come. I felt sure I should see you, to talk over this deplorable business, Shaw."

"First of all, Twisden, where is she? That's the first question I want to ask."

"I do not know exactly; and when I do learn it, that is what I am pledged not to reveal."

"Not to reveal to *me*, her guardian? God damn it! That is rather too much! I——"

"Hear me to an end, Shaw. Your niece is in a very excited state. I really believe it is far better to let her have her own way for a time, until she is calmed down. Of course, this won't last—it *can't* last. If you put detectives on her track, no doubt you can find her. But of what use would that be? You can't force her to go back to you; you wouldn't if you could. I had it all out with her here, and she only told me her plans on condition that I would not reveal them."

"But why am *I* not to be told?" cried William, returning to the charge with the helpless irascibility of a man incapable of taking in more than one idea. "I am her guardian, and her only living relation. Why am *I* to be kept in the dark? It's monstrous!"

"You see," began again the old solicitor, cautiously, "she has quarrelled with your wife; and she has taken a

horror of Colonel Wybrowe, who she says only wanted to marry her for her money."

"Why should she think that?" cut in the perplexed gentleman. "I'm sure she is a good-looking girl, and quick enough with her tongue, and rides well. Why should she choose to think——"

"Never mind *why;* she does think it. She thinks her money has brought her into trouble. She wants to get rid of it."

"To get rid of it!"

"Of the reputation of being an heiress; that is what I mean. She has left your house in a passion, and she dreads your pursuing her. I am not defending the course she has taken; but, being what she is, I am persuaded that nothing will induce her at present to return to Farley. If you run her to earth, you will probably make the breach lasting, which might only be temporary between you. Is it worth while? Is it not better to let me act for you in this matter, since she is disposed to trust me?"

"But—but what does she want to *do?* Why the deuce does she run away because she has had a row with Wybrowe and my wife? She could go and live at her own place, or—or anything, with some old woman, don't ye know? But to go off like this! What am I to say to the neighbours? *I* don't know."

"You can say she is gone to friends."

"She can't stay with friends for ever! And why is she to treat *me* like this, who've looked upon her almost as my own child since Anthony died? And me and my wife, I'm sure, have been as kind to her as anything. It's deuced ungrateful, Twisden—that's what it is."

"I don't think she is ungrateful, Shaw; but she is queer—decidedly queer. Women *are* queer, you know, sometimes—the fancies they take, and the tantrums they get into. Any way, I believe the best course to pursue in this case is—when I feel perfectly assured that she is safe, and in good hands—to leave her alone."

William Shaw wiped his brow and fidgeted in his chair. He was not quite sure what was the next objection that he ought to advance; he was sure he ought to advance *some*, and the solicitor did not help him.

"It's all very fine to talk about leaving her alone; but what is she going to do about money? If I don't know where she is, how——"

"She means to live for the next two years in retirement, for which the five hundred pounds placed annually to her credit is ample. When she comes of age we shall see what she is disposed to do. Long before that, I believe, she will think better of her foolish scheme. For the present she has her cheque-book, and will continue to draw her allowance as heretofore. The only precaution against her being swindled out of any large sum, which it is well we should take, is to warn the bank not to honour any cheque of hers beyond the balance on the income paid annually to her separate account. She is young, and generous, and ignorant of the world. She may also be credulous; I should not be surprised if she were. But, thus protected, she cannot come to much harm as regards money."

"And is everything to go on at Whiteburn—the farm and all that—just as before?"

"Of course. The estate will be managed exactly as heretofore."

"And what am I to say to the tenants and neighbours?" he sighed, returning to his original idea.

"You must let them understand that she got tired of the quiet life at Farley; that she wanted to see something more of the world; that she is paying visits to various friends. It is not true, of course; but we can't help that. Later, you can tell people that she is gone abroad—that she is travelling. That, I am sure, is near enough to the truth to satisfy a Jesuit," the old lawyer added, with a smile. "And really, my dear Shaw, we are in that position that we can't be too particular. I have thought a great deal over it. The thing is to avoid a scandal, and I see no way out of it but this."

"Well," conceded William, with a sigh, as he wiped his brow again, "neither do I; for my wife says, after Bessie treating her like this, she wouldn't like to take her back; so there's bound to be a row *that* way. If I only knew *where* she was, I wouldn't so much mind; but I don't feel as if I was doing my duty by the girl to let her go off and hide herself like this, without—without doing anything—eh?"

"I expect to know exactly where she is in the course of a day or two; at present I do not. I shall then communicate with you, and, on condition that you promise to leave her alone, I think I may promise that she shall write to you. I hope you will see the wisdom of subscribing to this. We have a difficult subject to deal with; one that requires great tact in handling."

William Shaw threw up his hands, and let them drop on his fat knees, with a gesture of discouragement.

"I suppose I must leave it to you, Twisden. I tried

to do my best by Anthony's child, and this is what it comes to! I must say it is deuced hard on me and my wife, who was as kind to the girl——"

"Well, well, Shaw, we won't talk about that. Think how much harder it would be if this marriage, which you encouraged, had taken place, and that your niece came to you and said, 'My life is ruined, my future destroyed. I hate and despise the man whom you persuaded me to marry.' Now she is free—free to make other ties, and to be eventually, I hope, a happy woman. That is the main thing. This tantrum of hers will pass off. It will come all right in time, if you will not be in a hurry. At present her only idea is to cut herself adrift, and to live where it is never suspected that she has a large fortune."

"Well," sighed his visitor heavily once more, as he rose from his chair, "I suppose there is nothing else to be done."

"Have her maid's box packed and sent here when you return home. I will see that she gets it. That is all."

They shook hands, and after a few more unimportant words, Shaw departed. In the outer office George Daintree was at his desk, apparently absorbed in accounts, but he sprang up with a genial smile to open the door for his uncle's client.

Two days later Joshua Twisden was taken to Hampstead, and a certain amount of authority was given to George to interview persons who called on the days that his uncle was absent. Should anything of importance require Mr. Twisden's decision, George was to drive up in the evening to Hampstead. At all events, he would

spend Sunday there (it was then Friday), and Mr. Twisden hoped early in the following week to be allowed to return to his daily work. He said to George at parting—

"Miss Shaw's maid will call here for her box, probably, in a day or two. If she has anything to say to me, send her up to Hampstead at once."

CHAPTER IX.

As it happened, his uncle had not been gone many hours, when a respectable-looking young woman, with an intelligent face, asked for Mr. Twisden, and said she had come to claim her trunk. She was shown into the inner office, where George sat in his uncle's chair of state.

"You are Miss Shaw's maid? Where did you leave her?" asked the young man, jauntily.

"I beg your pardon, sir. Are you Mr. Twisden? I understood Mr. Twisden was an elderly gentleman."

"I am Mr. Twisden's nephew and representative. You can speak openly to me. My uncle is ill, and has left London."

"I was to give this to Mr. Twisden—himself, sir." She held out a letter.

"It shall be delivered to him," said George, taking the letter. Then, as he held it carelessly in his hand, "Do you wish to see Mr. Twisden? Are you remaining in London?"

"No, sir; I shall go down to my friends in Devonshire by an evening train."

"Then you have definitely left Miss Shaw's service?"

"Yes, sir; she said I was no use abroad, as I did not speak any foreign language. But she behaved very

generously to me, and gave me the highest character, and said if I was out of place when she returned to England——"

"Oh! she is going to remain out of England some time, is she?"

"I am sure I don't know—I suppose so," replied the girl, colouring. Elizabeth had enjoined her to mention to no one the fact that she had crossed the seas, and now she had gone and let it out! But it was only to Mr. Twisden's nephew and representative, so it couldn't signify.

"Well, you had better leave your address with our clerk, in case Mr. Twisden wishes to communicate with you. Then he will whistle for a cab for you. You will find your trunk in the outer office. Good morning."

As soon as the door was shut, George Daintree turned over the letter in his hand, and examined the fastening of the envelope. He flushed quickly as he did so. He had never before thought of opening a letter not addressed to himself, but he thought of it now. What he had gathered from Mr. Shaw's conversation with his uncle had sharpened his curiosity concerning the heiress's strange escapade. He had just discovered that she was on the Continent. But where? This he was bent on learning; and if he gave Miss Shaw's letter unopened to his uncle, he might never learn it. George was more tenacious of purpose than of principle. During the last two days an idea had been forming in his brain, for the development of which it was essential he should obtain this knowledge. He was loth to open the letter. But, after all, what harm would it do to any one? He would

never betray the secret, which was of value to him alone. And his uncle would never know that the letter had been read, for he saw how easy it was to ungum and refasten the envelope. At the end of a few minutes his first step on the downward path was taken. He had moistened the adhesive part of the cover, and delicately slipping in a penknife, had opened it, and withdrawn the letter it contained. He then settled himself comfortably in his chair, and read as follows :—

"Paris, July 3rd, 10 p.m.

"Dear Mr. Twisden,

"This will be brought you by my maid, whom I am sending back to England by the first train to-morrow morning; so you will get my letter earlier than you would do by the post. I have been in Paris three days, but have only found this evening a 'pension' which seems likely to suit me. I saw several, some very fashionable, some very nasty—none that would do, till I was recommended at the library to go to Madame Martineau's, close to the Luxembourg Gardens—a house patronized, I was told, by many respectable French persons, of what I suppose we should call the upper-middle class, and very rarely by any English. Madame Martineau pleased me—a motherly sort of woman, without pretension, with whom I am sure you would not hesitate to feel I was safe, if you could see her. I learnt that there were three lady-boarders, one of whom is an artist, and one a writer—what she called 'une femme de lettres'—and six men. One of these is Russian, and one American, with his sister—both artists. The rest are

French, two being professors of the University, and all following some calling—no idlers. I can have (by paying extra) two rooms to myself. Of course my *atelier* will not be in the house, and I shall see but little of my fellow-lodgers. The less the better. As you may imagine, I am in no mood for society. I mean to work hard; it is the only way to drown recollection; but recollection with me will die hard. To-morrow I will write to my uncle. I believe this is due to him; but he must not know where I am. I trust implicitly to you to guard my secret. It is quite enough that *you* should know where I am. My maid believes that I am going to travel. Here, in an unfashionable quarter, I shall be as much lost as though I were in the backwoods of America. You will write to me, dear Mr. Twisden, I feel sure, and tell me *all you hear from Farley*. My address is 'Chez Madame Martineau, No. —, Rue ———, Paris.'

"Yours ever gratefully,

"ELIZABETH SHAW."

George sat buried in thought for some time after reading this letter. He then drew out his note-book, wrote down the address, and, after replacing the letter in the envelope, fastened it securely. If he felt any shame at what he had done, he tried to stifle the feeling. It was worth departing from the strict rules of honour, to obtain the information he had. The vague idea which had taken possession of his mind assumed a more tangible shape now that he knew exactly where Miss Shaw was, and would probably remain for some months. There was time before him to mature his scheme.

A couple of hours later he had delivered the letter, in person, to his uncle at Hampstead, and was seated in the parlour of Mr. Twisden's villa, overlooking a strip of garden, with the heath beyond. He lit a cigar while his uncle read.

"What did the maid say to you?" asked the old gentleman, as he replaced the letter in the envelope.

"Very little, except that she had left Miss Shaw on the Continent."

"I may trust you, George, not to repeat that?"

"Certainly. I suppose she is eccentric?"

"Well, yes—I must allow she is eccentric; but a clever young woman—a *very* clever young woman. She has got ideas which—which it is no use in the world to combat. She will grow wiser in time. The only thing, as I tell her uncle, is to leave her alone. She wants to live *incog.*—that no one shall know she is an heiress. Well, the only thing is to let her. All this is in confidence, George. I am committing no breach of trust in telling you thus much; but understand, you are not to mention Miss Shaw or her affairs to any one."

"It is the last thing I should think of doing," said his nephew; and he spoke the truth.

A week later Mr. Twisden was able to resume his daily visits to Gray's Inn, and George Daintree began to show a yellow stubble on his upper lip. His uncle, observing this, said with a smile—

"I see you are preparing for a trip abroad, and wish to discard Gray's Inn as much as possible?"

"I confess I do," returned the young man, frankly. "I

am in no hurry to go; but when I do get away, I want a perfect holiday—a holiday from shaving, and chimney-pots, and every other ensign of respectability."

"You deserve the luxury of being disreputable for a time. You have not had a holiday for so long; only don't let it demoralize you entirely. Where do you think of going?"

"Not very far—not out of France, I think."

"Well, you shall have six clear weeks. You can get over a lot of ground in that time."

"Certainly I can; but I shall not leave till you have discarded your stick. The autumn is really a better time to travel than the height of summer."

It was the end of the third week in September before George bade his uncle good-bye. He left no address. In case of emergency, he said, a communication might be sent by Mr. Twisden to his banker in Paris, who would know where George was to be found. Otherwise, letters were not to be forwarded. His plans were too uncertain. The necessity of replying to his correspondents would spoil all the pleasure he anticipated from his trip. It would be no holiday if he did not get rid of quills, ink, and paper. Should he have anything very particular to tell, he would write, but Mr. Twisden was not to expect letters. His uncle said he understood perfectly; he had once been five and twenty himself. Then he shook George's hand, and bade him go off and enjoy himself.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

MADAME MARTINEAU'S pension looked upon the gardens of the Luxembourg Palace, which in the dust and heat of July in Paris were as refreshing to all the senses as an oasis in the Sahara. The quarter is unfashionable, seldom visited by the *flâneurs* of the Champ Elysées and Boulevards, given over almost wholly to hard-workers with their brains or fingers, the gardens haunted by their respective wives, *bonnes*, and babies. This is what Elizabeth had sought, and what, after three days' search and inquiry at various artist-shops, she found—a safe refuge where she might run the least risk of being tracked by any one she knew. The number of her acquaintance was as yet small in her short journey through life, and among them there was not one French person. On the morning of the fifth day after her flight from Farley she had dismissed her maid, and without leaving her address at the hotel, had driven off with her boxes to the far distant quarter where she had secured two rooms. The doing this had caused much fluttering in the dovecote over which Madame Martineau presided.

Only an Englishwoman could be guilty of such extravagance, such eccentricity, as to require two rooms. But as she was ready to pay handsomely for the extra room, madame could only shrug her shoulders and mentally ejaculate, "Quelle dróle de demoiselle!"

Not till then—not till she sat down alone in her apartment, after unpacking her boxes, and leant out of its upper-floor windows looking upon the tops of the trees—did she begin to feel the reaction consequent upon the shock she had sustained. She had been driven along for the last five days on a whirlwind of passion, of revolt and disgust at everything surrounding her, from which she had fled, and which she vowed never willingly to see again. She was only now conscious of the shock which her whole moral nature had sustained. She seemed to herself to be years older than a week ago. She had been a vain and foolish child then; had she not grown to be a hard and cynical woman in these few days? With the cruel wisdom which experience alone buys, she judged not only others, but herself. Her cheeks burned with shame when she remembered how quick she had been to believe Wybrowe's lying protestations. Ignorance of life could not excuse—in her own eyes, at least—the readiness to fancy herself in love with such a man—a man of whom she knew so little, and that little so discreditable. That he was more than commonly depraved she had now been made fully aware, but were there not many others to whom she, as a wretched heiress, would prove equally a target to let fly their poisoned arrows at? Her thoughts glanced at Lord Robert Elton. He was a type—perhaps a favourable one, but still a type—of what she must

expect. Mr. Twisden might defend him as much as he pleased; he was manifestly a fortune-hunter, and she would be exposed through life to the attacks of such. Therefore she had seen at once that the only chance for her was to go where she should be absolutely unknown. She had declared, in her first bitterness, that she would eschew the society of all men alike. But this she knew was practically impossible; her artistic career would not admit of this. None, however, should be admitted to intimacy; on that she was resolved. And no one, man or woman, should have a suspicion that she had more than a small independence. She had hesitated some time about the second room, but as she meant to see as little as possible of her fellow-boarders, she decided to run the risk of being regarded as recklessly extravagant.

Madame Martineau rented the whole house, with the exception of the ground-floor. "Au Premier" was the antechamber, the public dining and drawing rooms, Madame Martineau's bedroom, the kitchen, and servants' offices. The furniture of the "salon" consisted of a sofa, two *fauteuils*, and eight chairs covered in brown Utrecht velvet. A marble table was in the middle of the room, on which stood a lamp, the shade of which represented a huge rose made of pink paper. A newspaper or two sometimes lay upon this table. It was the only literature the salon ever saw. On the mantelpiece, which was draped with Utrecht velvet to match the chairs, stood a gilt clock, representing Perseus, with the monster's head in one hand, from which depended huge gilt drops of blood, and a drawn sword in the other. It was currently reported that in the winter, Madame Martineau, whose

room adjoined, always undressed by this fire, and hung her garters upon Perseus's sword, where they had more than once been found. The poor lady allowed herself no such luxury as a fire in her own room, saving every centime that she could to administer to the comfort of her daughter, whose husband was a struggling something in the "Ponts et Chaussés."

Elizabeth took to the good-natured little woman on her first interview, and grew quite fond of her as time went on. It was said that she had been very pretty once, and, gossip went on to add, had been greatly admired in the thirties by the Duke of Orleans. It was difficult to believe her old enough for this; she did not look more than fifty-five. But in spite of her jet-black hair, with just a silver thread or two crossing it, her fine even teeth and sparkling black eye, Professor Genron, the oldest *pensionnaire*, who had known her for twenty years, declared her to be seventy. She dressed with scrupulous neatness, in black, with generally a violet or mauve ribbon, which she thought becoming to her complexion; once a clear olive, now some shades deeper, with a tinge of orange. Many a great hostess might have learned from madame the art of amalgamating heterogeneous materials, and setting guests at their ease. It was her study to make those who met at her table happy—to smooth over the rough places, and soften the asperities of prejudice. She was indulgent as to moral peccadilloes—Madame de Belcour said, with her keepsake smile, "Who should be, if Madame Martineau was not?"—but careful, for the sake of the reputation her pension bore, that no flagrant sinners should flaunt their vices under her very nose.

None was admitted without a reference (Elizabeth's had been her banker's Paris correspondent); all bills were paid weekly; no gambling was allowed on the premises. For the rest, what her lodgers did concerned madame in no wise. But she had tender, motherly instincts. Never before had a girl of Elizabeth's age come to her unprotected. *Was she really so?* The suspicion probably crossed her mind; Elizabeth's independence and extravagance lent it some support. Madame's discrimination, however, very quickly told her that she was at fault, and gradually she began to feel an interest in this odd young person, and to desire that all the other inmates of her establishment should be favourably disposed towards her —which, it must be confessed, they were not at first.

Elizabeth's rooms were on the third floor, to the front, the adjoining one being occupied by a young poet of the latest development, whose erotic verse, strange to relate, had not met with as much public favour as its want of castigation would have led one to expect. Perhaps its obscurity in parts may have accounted for this. In a few literary circles his work had been discussed and—dismissed. One eminent academician had said that perhaps, if it were translated into French, he might understand it. Professor Genron, the oldest of the boarders at Madame Martineau's, frankly declared he had no desire to try. Madame de Belcour, on the other hand, who wrote articles in provincial papers, and regarded herself as a literary woman, affirmed them to be deeply moving. His handsome head had probably something to say to the movement; and as he was a man who laid himself out to commit havoc among the fair sex, his conquests afforded

him some consolation for the neglect with which his muse was treated. He was considered to resemble Monsieur Mounet Sully; and he encouraged the likeness, rolling his eyes and tumbling his hair, and having generally a distraught, Byronic aspect. The house was divided against itself as regarded Anatole Doucet; Madame de Belcour heading the faction who held him to be an unappreciated genius; Professor Genron, the caustic old cynic, giving pungent expression to the contempt which some felt for the young man's pretensions.

Among those who defended the poet, possibly less from any conviction of his ability than because of the professor's antagonism, was Dr. Morin, a prominent member of the pension, and attached to a hospital in the neighbourhood. His room was also on the third floor, to the back, adjoining one which was still vacant. Morin was a clever little man—far more genial than Genron, whom he detested, and with so much gas in his composition that he seldom failed to light the table at which he sat. The professor opposite might smile sardonically at his sallies, but the little doctor had the best of it.

The floor above was tenanted by a Russian, named Narishkine, said to be a Nihilist; and a law-student of the Quartier Latin, named Bertrand, who led the chorus of appreciative laughter at table, in response to Genron's and Morin's wit. Madame de Belcour, Madame Clinchaut, Genron, and an American brother and sister, named Baring, occupied the second floor, over the public rooms of the pension.

Of Madame de Belcour nothing was known—not even whether a Monsieur de Belcour existed, or ever did exist.

She was handsome, *piquante*, well dressed; she said smart things, even ill-natured things, with a little languid air, which lent them additional point. Her laced petticoats were the admiration and wonder of all the women; her wonderful little feet the admiration of all the men. She was so well painted that it would have seemed heartless to wish her washed clean; and the aroma of *maréchale* powder which she enhaled was beneficent to the nostrils of some, loathsome to others. Her adherents were chiefly men, to whom she was always gracious. Her own sex, as a rule, did not love her. Madame Martineau never said ill of any one, but she was known to clear her throat when appealed to as to her handsome *pensonnaire*. Old Madame Clinchaut detested her; even Miss Baring, who wished to be on good terms with all her fellow-boarders, instinctively avoided the cruel-tongued lady of the languid eyes. There was a freezing surface between them, over which each skated at meal-time; nothing more.

Miss Baring was a plain little woman of nine and twenty, pale, with intelligent eyes, imperfectly apprehended through a *pince-nez*, a figure like a knife-board, and rusty hair, which did her the injustice of looking as though it had not been brushed. In reality, I believe she brushed her hair almost as much as that unfortunate Eliza Westbrook whom Hogg has immortalized so painfully in his records of Shelley. But a rough-and-tumble arrangement was the one tribute to picturesqueness this cleanly and sensible woman paid to the art which both she and her brother pursued. She was energetic, thorough, unimaginative, with a fund of good sense, and occasionally

a touch of sarcasm, altogether the last person in the world one would have expected to choose painting as a profession, still less to have become an "impressionist." Yet "impressionism" held her in its grip, as it did her brother. Unfortunately she was, physically, far from strong. Even in this summer season she had a cough, and was always trying to do twice as much as her strength warranted. Paris was probably the worst place for her in the winter, yet she had been here nearly a year because of her brother, and here she meant to remain.

Alaric Baring, who was two years older, was tall and thin—it might be said angular. He had a chivalrous-looking head, not absolutely handsome, for his cheek-bones were too high, his nose too aquiline, and his pointed beard was of that reddish hue which is chiefly appreciated on canvas. He had often a strange, abstracted look on his face, as though his thoughts were very far away. Madame de Belcour said he represented to her what Don Quixote must have been before—but not *very* long before—he went mad. This was said after they had been in the pension together for some months, during which she had vainly endeavoured to ensnare him. He did not avoid her; it was for him as though the lady did not exist. He bowed when they met; he answered if she spoke; but half the time at table, though she sat directly opposite to him, he seemed not to see her. It must be confessed he rarely contributed much to the conviviality of the board. He was a taciturn man at times, and those times when it most behooved him to talk. Elizabeth, who sat between him and Dr. Morin, found the Frenchman much the pleasanter the first night at dinner. But I may

as well give her impressions, in her own words, from her diary, written the night of her arrival. She had reason to alter many of her judgments; and when she read the passage long afterwards, she declared that the only character it faithfully portrayed was—her own!

"I feel like one starting on a long voyage, who will be shut up in a ship for months with so many fellow-passengers. I hate the looks of them all—all except Madame Martineau herself. She is an old dear. But the men! I try and think that all men are alike. These certainly are not likely to raise my estimate of *man*ity. Madame Martineau says three of them are very clever in their several ways; but all the Frenchmen here are so egotistical. It was '*moi qui vous parle—moi*' from the beginning of dinner till the end. Opposite me sat Professor Genron, who reminded me of the statue of Voltaire in the gallery of the Théâtre Français. The same keen and cunning eyes, the same satirical smile, the head stooped forward, eager, I am sure, to catch all the meannesses of humanity, but with little sympathy for what is noble. Next to him was a Madame de Belcour, whom it amused me to watch. She is like a beautiful cat, so soft, and oh! so sentimental! On her other side was a young poet, a Monsieur Anatole Doucet, whom Madame Martineau says is a genius, as well as remarkable for his beauty. He has large eyes, which he fixes on one, like a cow who sees a train passing. He runs his fingers through his long black locks every few minutes, and he wears his napkin tucked into his shirt-collar! If I were a man, I would sooner pour a spoonful of gravy down my shirt-front than advertise my childish incapacity to eat properly. But all

the Frenchmen did the same thing. The one next me was a Dr. Morin, a very small man, with a big bumpy forehead and little glittering eyes, who talked volubly, and made every one laugh—every one except the professor opposite; I observed he never laughed at anything Dr. Morin said. The latter was extremely attentive to me, and tried to make me talk by asking all manner of questions, which I thought forward, and showed him that I thought so by my manner; but it was of no use. I felt that I was a sort of rock over which the torrent poured; it was in no degree stemmed or diverted from its course. I disliked him *less* than any one else; that is the most I can say. How weary I was, how sick of it all, before dinner was over, and I could escape to my own room! On my left hand sat an American, named Baring, with ginger-coloured hair and beard. I saw nothing but his profile, as he never addressed a word to me, or even turned his head in my direction. He took no part in the general conversation, much of which was lively, to judge by the peals of laughter (for I did not understand a great deal of it); and what with his thinness and his silence, he made me feel as I were sitting next to that proverbial skeleton which has done such long and arduous service since the feast of the Egyptians! His sister was next him—a very plain little woman, badly dressed, with hair that looks as if the chickens had been scratching it. How I hate ugly people! And the two good-looking ones here are not attractive to me. No one but Madame de Belcour and Monsieur Doucet has a pretension to good looks. Further down the table sat a jovial young student named Bertrand, who laughed very loud; an old Madame

Clinchaut, whose white hairs should claim reverence: but I doubt if I shall revere this old woman. She laughed so indecently at some of the jokes that were fired off, that I felt instinctively it was as well I did not understand them. Madame Martineau laughed, but it was in a deprecatory way. Madame de Belcour morally put her hand before her face, and smiled diabolically between her fingers, like Orcagna's '*Vergoznosa del Campo Santo*,' which I remember seeing at Pisa, and which my dear father told me had passed into a proverb. What Miss Baring did I could not see. The only other person present was a Russian, of preternatural ugliness, who swelled the chorus of laughter, and talked incessantly at the other end of the table. I feel a profound distaste for my company. How shall I be able to endure life among such people? My heart sinks as I contemplate the prospect. I have voluntarily elected to pass, at least, many months here, and, were I alone, I could be content; but that I know, at my age, would be impossible in Paris. I am thankful I secured a sitting-room; there I can retire, immediately dinner is over, and be safe from intrusion. I must work—work. It is the only remedy to prevent my thoughts dwelling upon the horrible past; for 'this way madness lies.'"

Two days later there was this entry:—

"I am more reconciled to this pension, chiefly owing to a person against whom I felt nothing but antipathy at first! So much for impressions. Miss Baring did not speak to me the first evening, and all yesterday we did not exchange six words. I spent it chiefly hunting for an atelier, and trying to find some class of painting I can

join till Monsieur D——'s, which is now closed, reopens. This morning, without further preamble, she walked up to me and said—

"'We are the only two English-speaking women here, and I think ought to make friends.'

"I looked surprised, but murmured something, when she continued—

"'I am a good deal older than you, and perhaps may be of some use to you. I understand you are here to study painting.'

"I told her I wished to become a pupil of Monsieur D——'s, but added that as I had nothing but a rough sketch or two with me to show what I could do, I doubted if the master in question would take me as a pupil.

"He is absent from Paris till October. But I have a studio, and am working at some models till the classes are open again. You had better come and do the same. Then, by the time Monsieur D—— returns, you will have something to show him.'

"The offer was a kind one. She must have wondered why I coloured as I accepted it. It was the recollection of what I had written here about her which made me feel ashamed. Really, when I came to talk to her, she was not so ugly, and had such a pleasant way of speaking—so simple and straightforward; but she has a tiresome cough, and looks ill. She told me she came from Maryland, but had been abroad for many years with her invalid mother, who died last summer. Then she joined her brother in Paris. He had been painting here for two years. He was considered one of the most rising of the young American School. I asked what that was? She

replied they were, more or less, 'impressionists.' Her brother's studio was next to hers; he often looked in to see how her work was getting on, and gave her some hints. I asked if she liked the pension. To my surprise, she replied, 'Very much.' I said nothing, but wondered. Then she added, 'You can't expect *every one* to be nice in a place like this. Some of them are bad enough.' By this time we were in the street. She took me to a colour-man, where I bought all my materials, and then on to her atelier. Her work was curious; I can't say I thought it good. It represented a girl's back, seen apparently through a fog, with very crude green and violet shadows, which (perhaps my vision is at fault) I do not see in nature. By-and-by the model arrived, and there was the back. Well, the back did not look to me violet. There was plenty of red and yellow in it, but my eyes refused to see the violet and green. I felt depressed. If it should turn out that Monsieur D—— expected his pupils to see nature like that, I knew I couldn't do it. I thought of Titian, of Velasquez. I wondered whether I should not do better to copy certain portraits in the Louvre, which I well remembered. But to work straight from nature was more congenial to me than to try to imitate the work of even the greatest men; so I resolved to make a study of the girl's head—I would leave her back alone. When the model had left, Miss Baring produced three cups and an Etna, and said she was going to make tea. As soon as the water boiled, she left the room, and rapped with her maulstick at the door of the adjoining atelier. This was an understood signal; a few minutes later her brother

appeared. I had only seen his profile either night at dinner. He had not deigned to turn his full face upon me (but then, it is true, I had been rather rude the second evening). I was astonished to find how much less ill-looking he is than I had imagined. And then he certainly has a fine figure, though too thin. His manner is curious. He rarely smiles, and is rather brusque in his utterances, but these leave the impression of having been inevitable. If he must speak, why, then there shall be no beating about the bush. You shall have the truth, or nothing. His voice is pleasant; his steel-grey eyes are pleasant. I recognize a power in the man, which perhaps is more apparent in what he does *not* say than in what he does. There was no surprise at finding me in his sister's room; she had prepared him, of course, for what she meant to do. He bowed stiffly, and then, glancing at my easel, said—

"'You have begun a study of Lucie's head?' He went up close to it, adding after a minute, 'The ear is not in the right place; the rest is fairly sketched in.'

"'Thank you,' I replied. 'The girl's ear is placed abnormally low.'

"'Not as low as that. But perhaps you don't like criticism? I beg your pardon. I forgot. We are used here to criticize each other's work all round.'

"'You may criticize mine freely,' I said, colouring. 'I am ignorant, and—and I can't see things in other people's way. That is because I have worked so much alone, I suppose.'

"While his sister poured out the tea, he walked up to her easel. I was curious to hear what he would say

to the violet-and-green modelling. To my amazement, he said nothing. We sat down to tea. He asked me whether portrait-painting was my ambition? I said I thought any talent I had lay in that line, but that I should not like to paint portraits exclusively.

"'An amateur?' he asked again, looking directly at me with those searching eyes.

"'I am afraid I shall never be good enough to be anything else,' I replied. 'Women seldom rise above mediocrity.'

"It was a stupid speech, and not quite sincere. I have a better opinion of my own ability than my words indicated.

"'There are many clever lady-artists in Paris,' was the rejoinder, given, as I imagined, in a tone of some reproof.

"'Miss Hitch, for instance,' struck in his sister—'one of the American School. She sells her pictures for quite a high figure, and is making a considerable name for herself.'

"'Well, Hatty,' said the brother, balancing his spoon on the edge of his cup, and looking down at it, 'I wouldn't cite Miss Hitch. It is said she has a "ghost"—that her work is not all her own. There are others whose work is certainly genuine;' and he quoted one or two names, which I have forgotten. 'Marie Baschkirtseff had talent. She was above mediocrity.'

"'Was she anything but a clever imitator? I shouldn't care to sit at the feet of any master—Bastien-Lepage, or any one else—and paint things that might be taken, a long way off, for his!' I said scornfully.

"'Youth is generally imitative, in any form of art,' he

observed; and this time he did not look at me. 'The best writers, as the best painters and sculptors, have been imitative in the beginning. They caught on to the wings of others, before they found their own strength, and could fly alone. If you want to fly alone at first, you'll tumble.'

"I thought this rude; but I answered, I hope with quiet dignity, 'It is because I know I can't fly alone, that I am going to Monsieur D——'s atelier. If I find that I am no better than a Chinese, I shall give it up.'

"'Ah! You will do right—if you are no better than a Chinese,' he said dryly.

"Miss Hatty laughed. 'We can't all give it up, though we may be no better than Chinese. We must live. After all, an imitation—Corot or Daubigny—may give some benighted persons pleasure?'

"I held my peace. I wondered whether the dear woman's green-and-violet shadows could give any human being pleasure. Her brother did not say much more. Having finished his tea, he rose and left the room, and soon afterwards his sister and I strolled into the Luxembourg Gardens, where we sat and watched the merry, shrill-voiced children playing with their balloons from the 'Bon Marché,' and the white-capped Norman *bonnes* with their broad streamers hovering over them, in the striped sunshine and shadow of the trees."

CHAPTER II.

THIS evening Elizabeth stayed a short time in the *salon* after dinner. With the closing of the door behind her, when she sought her own room, she left her character to be fought over, much as a bone is disputed by hungry dogs. The young student had slipped away. Alaric Baring took up the *Moniteur du Soir* and read, or affected to read, in the fading light at the window. His sister was knitting; but she joined in the general tournament of talk, without relaxing for an instant the clock-like movement of her fingers.

Morin (*as soon as the door is shut, rubbing his hands*). "She is less sauvage to-night. We shall tame her in time!"

Mdme. Martineau. "She is English. You must make allowances."

Miss Baring. "And she is very young. She has a striking face. Don't you think so, Monsieur Genron?"

Genron (*laughing sarcastically*). "Striking, mademoiselle? She looks as if she would not be content to strike—as if she would run you through the body!"

Mdme. de Belcour. "C'est qu'elle pose en Jeanne d'Arc."

Doucet (*twirling his moustache*). "When she has known

what love is, she will be handsome. She has fine eyes. She only wants the torch to be lighted."

Mdme. M. (*shaking her finger to Monsieur D.*). "Ah! Monsieur Doucet, prenez garde! You must not be playing with fire in my house!"

Doucet (*with a fatuous smile*). "I never play with it, madame. If the lightning strikes me——"

Morin (*laughing loudly*). "And as Mademoiselle Shaw is all thundercloud at present, he feels sure the lightning will strike him! Poor Doucet! Shall I get you a lightning-conductor, mon ami?"

Miss Baring (*with a smile*). "Let Monsieur Doucet be reassured. Miss Shaw's is only summer-lightning. It does not kill."

Narishkine. "Elle a l'air très rébarbatif."

Mdme. Clinchaut (*shaking her head*). "C'est vrai. Elle n'est pas avenante—allez! Elle ne rit même pas."

Morin. "Ah! she does not understand."

Mdme. de B. "She understands enough to find the professor's stories and yours, doctor, very shocking." (*Here she laughs.*)

Genron. "The Mees Anglaise finds everything shocking!"

Baring (*looking up from the "Moniteur," in good serviceable French, without much accent*). "Does the French girl find nothing shocking, professor?"

(The American so seldom speaks, that the room is startled.)

Genron (*grinning*). "The conversation in convents is said sometimes to be very enlightening. Unfortunately, I never heard it. When she leaves the convent, the

French girl marries. If she does not, and if she frequents pensions, she is not scandalized at a little *mot pour rire.*"

Miss Baring (*without looking up from her knitting*). "I am many years older than this young lady, and I am a better French scholar, but I don't understand half your jokes, so certainly she does not; but I am sure you are too chivalrous—all Frenchmen are chivalrous, are they not?—to say what would make us feel uncomfortable, especially this young girl, if we understood it."

Mdme. M. (*quickly*). "That is quite right, mademoiselle—quite right. Madame Clinchaut and I are old women, and Madame de Belcour is a widow. With us it does not signify; but I am sure the professor and the doctor will understand that they must not frighten away la petite Anglaise."

Mdme. de B. "Especially as she can afford to take two rooms."

Narishkine. "Ah! all the English are rich. Blessed country!"

Genron. "Which offers a refuge to Nihilists and Anarchists. You know it, monsieur?"

Narishkine. "Every enlightened man knows it, monsieur—except Frenchmen, who are ignorant of everything out of their own country."

Mdme. M. (*throwing herself into the breach, before it widens*). "Ah! it is that channel! If it were not for that channel, even I—moi qui vous parle—would have paid a visit to a dear friend of mine, some years ago, who inhabited le Can—Can—how do you say?—le Cantorbury?"

Mdme. de B. (*with an evil twinkle*). "You wished to worship at the shrine of St. Thomas?"

Morin. "Madame Martineau wisely decided in favour of French sinners against the English saint."

Genron. "The English saint seems to have come here instead, and your conversation will have to be apostolic, Monsieur le Docteur, henceforward—hein?"

Morin. "Mine? Ah! par exemple! It is rather *your* tongue that must be held in leash, Monsieur le Professeur!"

Mdme. M. (*once more flinging herself between the combatants*). "Mees Shaw has splendid eyes—and what hair!"

Doucet. "It is like the clouds of night, swept away by the daybreak."

Mdme. de B. (*with her keepsake air*). "How poetical! Yes, she has fine hair. Seulement—si mal coiffée."

Genron. "Ah! madame, it is not given to every woman to be a barber's block. Her hair is her own. She is a child of nature."

Narishkine. "And all Parisians are children of art."

Morin. "I maintain art is preferable to nature. You are sure of it. Nature is so uncertain."

Doucet. "We love by nature, as the beasts. We love with art, as the gods."

Baring (*startling the circle once more*). "Some of the gods *were* beasts; and so is many a pagan worshipper now, whatever be his calling. Poetry, art, learning, will not save him, if the baser half of his double nature gain the predominance."

(With that he rises, touches his sister on the shoulder,

and they leave the room together. The company look at each other. Most of them smile, and shrug their shoulders.)

Doucet (*twirling his moustache*). "C'est un impertinent."

Morin (*laughing.*) "He is American, mon cher—c'est tout. All the same, I respect him. He has the courage of his opinions. He is not amusing—no. But when he *does* speak, he says what he thinks. It is a pity that what he thinks is stupid."

* * * * * *

Elizabeth, meantime, is in her own room, composing a reply, which is not easy, to the letter she received two days ago from Uncle William. Here it is, a curious document, penned evidently with mental difficulty, and almost pathetic in its blind groping for something tangible which should account for Elizabeth's flight.

"My dear Girl,

"We are awfully cut up, your aunt and I, at your extraordinary conduct. We thought we were doing all we could to make you happy here. And the marriage with Colonel Wybrowe seemed the very thing to suit you. Such a good fellow, whom your aunt and I think so highly of! He is gone away, of course, very down in the mouth at your treatment of him, which he cannot make out about—I mean what he has done to offend you—a bit more than we can. I never had anything that vexed me and surprised me more. What would your poor father say, if he was alive, at your running away, in this mad manner, without letting us know? If you want to be alone, why should you not go back and live

at your own place? Pray think better of this, and do not let the scandal get about the county that you have run off, God knows where, by yourself. Your aunt has been made quite ill by this; I never knew her so nervous and upset. Though I must say I think you have behaved very ungratefully, I remain always,

"Your affectionate uncle,

"WILLIAM SHAW.

"P.S.—Pray write at once; and, if you will return, I will meet you anywhere, and all shall be forgotten."

This is the reply Elizabeth forces herself at last to write:—

"MY DEAR UNCLE,

"I know my conduct must appear very strange to you, and, unfortunately, I cannot explain my motives for behaving as I have done. Believe me, I am not ungrateful for all the kindness you have shown me, but there are many reasons why I desire for awhile to remain absolutely unknown; above all, that my being an heiress should not transpire. It was this, and this only, I have now positive proof, which was my only attraction in the eyes of one to whom I very nearly fell a victim. If I had been married to him, and had gained the knowledge I now have of his character, I should equally have run away. Judge, then, whether it is not better for all concerned that I did so before he and I were bound together. You will understand, of course, that my returning to Whiteburn is not compatible with my wish for obscurity. When I am of age I will

decide whether to go back there. As the place was of my dear father's making, I should never wish to sell it, but the idea of living there is at present very distasteful to me.

"I do not expect you to understand, or to forgive me. I have behaved, apparently, very badly, my dear uncle. So you and all your friends have a right to believe. But by-and-by, when the secrets of all hearts are made known, it may be that you will not think so hardly of

"Your ever grateful and affectionate

"ELIZABETH SHAW."

CHAPTER III.

At the end of a fortnight, Elizabeth had become more reconciled to her life and surroundings at Madame Martineau's than at first had seemed possible to her. At the end of a month she had fully recognized the wisdom of Miss Baring's philosophy, who, in speaking of the three Frenchmen, said—

"You must take these people as you find them. It is of no use our coming with our English or American ideas, and expecting to find they obtain here. Among Frenchmen, especially of the second class (I dare say of the upper class also, but I know nothing about *them*), there is often something that must be connived at in their talk. They are good-humoured; there is scarcely a subject under the sun they cannot discuss, and upon many they are well informed. Unfortunately, in the desire to be amusing, they are often coarse, and in their innuendoes and suggestions are unrestrained by any sense of propriety. Well, one must just turn a deaf ear—that is all; pretend one doesn't understand."

"As a matter of fact, I very often don't," said Elizabeth. "But when I see Madame de Belcour laugh, it makes me angry. Now, *do* you think Madame de Belcour a nice woman?"

"Nice? No, not at all. I dislike her particularly. But there she is, and it is no use making a wry face at her. We have been six months in the pension together (she came long after us), and are on distantly civil terms, and I know no more about her than I did the first day I came."

"I don't like associating with people who inspire me with distrust."

"Then you should not come to a pension. You cannot expect, among twelve people gathered from every part of the earth, not to find some shady characters."

"I wish they were all like you," said Elizabeth, smiling. "How nice it would be!"

"Rather monotonous, I expect;" and Miss Baring returned the smile.

The two women had now become as intimate as it is possible to be, when one is perfectly frank and the other reticent of all that concerns the past. Miss Hatty, indeed, had nothing to conceal, nor any love-confidences to make. She had reached the age of twenty-nine without a proposal, without a romance. Her troubles had all been of the most prosaic kind—loss of money, lawsuits, and the long lingering illness of an exacting parent. Her pride and her happiness were centred in her brother. It was the only point on which Elizabeth thought her new friend decidedly weak. He was, no doubt, a man of strength and originality of mind; and he was a clever painter. So much Elizabeth was willing to concede. She saw very little of him, except in the studio; but there she had got to value his opinion, in a way, and to listen to his remarks with interest. He was unlike any one she

had ever met. Between this estimate of the man, however, and considering him as a paragon of perfection, an oracle whom there was no gainsaying, as his sister did, there was a wide gulf. It made Elizabeth a little irritable sometimes to have Alaric's opinion quoted as an authority which should effectually prevent further discussion. That so independent-minded a woman should have come to Hatty Baring's years, believing any human being to be infallible, or nearly so, struck her new friend as very odd. She did not see that, though unlike in person and manner, there was an extraordinary sympathy between the brother and sister, which made Hatty understand him when others did not. She was much less clever, but her perception was quicker; and it was a mistake to imagine that she always trusted to his judgment, built on first impressions. At this very time there was a divergence of opinion between them on the subject of Elizabeth herself, in which, as we shall see presently, Hatty held her own, and would not yield an inch.

The classes had not yet begun, and Elizabeth continued to paint from models in Miss Baring's atelier, and to receive Mr. Baring's criticisms daily at teatime. It was sometimes a pleasant half-hour, but not always. He never spared her, since she had expressly desired him to say what he thought of her work. Therefore she was too sensible to resent hearing the truth—that is, the truth as it appeared to *him;* and with regard to anatomy, she made no mental reservation in her acceptance of his strictures. But when it came to colour it was different. If she felt rather pleased with the result of her morning's labour, his words often fell over her like a douche of cold

water, without any healthy reaction. For the opinion of so able a painter could not be disregarded. She recognized that his painting was good—very good—though it belonged to a school which was new to her, and with which she could not honestly feel much sympathy. She told Hatty so frankly—Hatty, whose own painting was the worst possible example of the same methods. Elizabeth felt that it would be impossible to sit in the same atelier, drawing from the same model, day after day, and leave her new friend's work unnoticed. It was better to take the bull by the horns, as she did before a week was over, and say—

"People see nature differently. I was never so convinced of this before. You see what I do not in those flesh-tints, and I as evidently see what you do not. Mr. Baring says I use too much bistre, that my tones are too brown. I dare say he is right—I am sure he is right; but Nature looks to me like that. I can't see it as you and he do."

"Don't you admire his painting?"

"Oh yes. It seems to me exceedingly clever—a little audacious, I suppose?—but awfully clever. Only I am sure, if I saw the lady and child he is painting, they would not appear to me quite like that. I see *too much*, perhaps."

"So I suppose," said Hatty, dryly.

It was useless to discuss the subject further. Miss Baring looked to the time when her new friend's eyes should be opened; for that she was unusually gifted, the attention which Alaric paid to her studies clearly indicated. He never said so—he only said it was a pity she had been badly taught; but Hatty knew her brother.

Though he criticized Miss Shaw's painting, had there not been remarkable promise, he would have passed it by unnoticed. From that day forward there was a tacit understanding that it was not necessary for either girl to say anything of the other's daily work. Hatty knew that in Elizabeth's benighted condition she could not possibly appreciate an impressionist's view of a model. And Elizabeth, on her side, felt that the opinion of a person whose optic nerve was so strangely constituted as Miss Baring's would be of no value, no help, to her. Her brother was a fine draughtsman, and his mastery over the brush was so remarkable that much was to be learned from him in mere "technique." It was not so with Hatty. Elizabeth said to herself, a little scornfully, that it was fraternal partiality which made Mr. Baring so lenient—often absolutely silent—about Hatty's work. He would stand over her easel for a minute or two, and perhaps point his finger to some flagrant fault in drawing, but he never dwelt at any length upon the defects. His severe criticism of Elizabeth's own work was, if she could have known it, the greatest compliment to her talent. She was worth severity. His attachment to his sister did not blind him to the fact that she could never paint well. But it amused her; it was not worth while to discourage her attempts. She was so frail, poor little woman, that he sometimes thought, with a heavy sigh, "She will go the way of our mother, but earlier. It little signifies how she paints—poor Hatty!"

Elizabeth's sitting-room was a harbour of refuge, where the girls always retired shortly after dinner, and where Mr. Baring never joined them. Sometimes, however, all

three walked out together in the warm summer evenings; and occasionally Madame Martineau had seats, from a mysterious source, for the Français or the Odéon, which she gave to the girls, or took them with her. They had also tickets offered them once or twice by Messieurs Morin and Doucet; but as these were for theatres where plays were being enacted which, Madame Martineau declared, were not *convenable* for young unmarried ladies, they were refused. Elizabeth dearly loved a play. She would willingly have paid for herself and her companions once or twice a week; but, in the first place, she knew they would not accept places on these terms; and secondly, such extravagance would vitiate the impression of herself which she had taken pains to produce, as of a young person possessing only a moderate independence. Her sitting-room, it is true, favoured the idea of recklessness—that she could not help; on every other point she flattered herself she was economical, to the verge of parsimony.

After the first week of Elizabeth's entering the pension, its inmates, with one or two exceptions, agreed that, considering she was English, she was much less stiff, much pleasanter, than might have been expected—as appearance, indeed, at first had led them to fear. They had grown more guarded in their language, less *risqués* in their jokes, and she rewarded them by unbending from her attitude of dignified reserve.

To those who had known her but a short time since, a great change, it is true, would have been apparent—a change corresponding with that we see sometimes, very suddenly, in the human face. The experience of the

past weeks had left their trace on her mind and on her manner. Yet she gradually found her interest reviving in the conversation upon art and literature and public affairs which went on around her; her intellect was too keen, her sympathies too healthy, for her to brood upon her own troubles, to the exclusion of other subjects. She asked odd questions, she made acute observations; she amused both the elder men greatly; and Narishkine said, with a world of meaning in his intonation, that she was *étrange*. Whether her freedom from conventionality led her to be misjudged, is another question. Opinions differed very greatly on this point. Madame de Belcour affirmed, with a little laugh, that she suspected *l'Anglaise* to be "a prude, lined with a warm capacity for enjoyment." Professor Genron advanced, as a physiological fact, that morality was entirely a question of the shape of the hand. Mademoiselle's fingers were unfortunately virtuous. Professor Morin was strong upon eyes. He did not consider the eyes of the *jeune Anglaise* were encouraging. Whereupon madame responded, as many have done before, "You men are so easily deceived. Trust a woman to know her own sex." Doucet was silent, for once. But his looks expressed that "he could, an he would," say much.

It is worth while here to transcribe a conversation between the two Barings, which took place some five weeks after Elizabeth's arrival. It tells, first hand, the relative position of this brother and sister towards each other; also it indicates, better than I can describe, the exact impression her new friend made upon the sister, and the less exact impression which the brother believed that their new friend had made upon himself.

They were sitting in Miss Baring's bedroom, discussing a letter which she had just received from an aunt in New York. This aunt was a wealthy woman, and had once before (on the occasion of Mrs. Baring's death) written to offer her niece a home. In declining this offer, Hatty had said that her brother wished her to remain in Paris, where she meant to study, and ultimately she hoped to support herself by, painting. Nine months had passed, and the offer was now renewed. As she finished reading aloud the letter, in which the invitation was pressed with even more warmth than before, Miss Baring said—

"The question is, am I justified in still refusing? Am I justified in saying that I shall ever be able to support myself by painting?"

"I do not see the necessity of saying anything about it. It is enough that I wish you to remain with me."

"Aunt Jane evidently thinks, and rightly too, that I ought not to be a burthen on you, Ally."

"Then why doesn't she make you an allowance? She is a selfish old woman, she wants you to be at her beck and call. She fancies everything is to give way to her, and the opposition she meets with only makes her more obstinate. You know me too well, Hatty, to be moved by any such argument. Pay no attention to that part of the letter."

"Very well, dear, I will not. But you avoid answering my question. Shall I ever make enough by painting to be independent?"

He hesitated. "Many women do, without very distinct talent. At all events, you are happy in pursuing art,

and I am happy to have you here with me. Is not that enough? We are alone in the world. Why should we be separated?"

"You will not always be alone, I hope."

"Do you think I want to marry?" he said, with a smile. "Nothing is further from my thoughts. I have not yet made enough to support a wife and child, even if I had ever seen the woman I desired to marry."

"There is time enough," returned his sister, quickly. "It will come. Of course I had rather stay with you than be in all the luxury of Aunt Jane's house at Boston. But, if I stay, you must promise me one thing."

"And that is——?"

"You will tell me frankly when the time comes that you wish to be free. You say you could not support a wife at present, but you may choose one who has means of her own."

"Do you suppose I would live on my wife's means?"

"*Live* on them—yourself—no. But they would prevent your having any anxiety for *her*. With your genius, you are sure to make a very large income before long."

He laughed at her enthusiasm. "I wish I was as sure of it. The door of my atelier is not blocked by Astors and Vanderbilts, clamouring to have their portraits."

"It will come—it is bound to come," she said decisively. Then, after a little pause, looking up and watching her brother narrowly, "I want to know, Ally, what you think of Miss Shaw?"

"Do you mean as an artist?"

"Well, as an artist to begin with; then, as a woman."

"She has decided talent, if she can ever be brought to

see. At present, of course she does not know how to look at nature. She is all wrong; and I fancy she is obstinate."

"She would not be so original as she is if she adopted readily other people's views. She has a strong character."

"She is full of English prejudice. *That* is not very original."

"Why do you say so?"

"Can't you see what she thinks of Americans? It constantly crops up, though she tries to conceal it."

"She is very young, and I believe we are the first Americans she has ever known."

"But she has that insularity which puts her out of touch with anything that is not English. She is as proud as she can be. She tolerates us because—because you were kind to her, and I can be of use to her, and she is not ungrateful; but, all through it, one sees that she has an immense idea of her own importance—her own superiority."

"You are quite wrong. I never knew you *so* wrong in your judgment of any one's character. She has great independence, and a certain pride, I admit; but not at all of the kind you attribute to her."

"Look at her manner to every one at table when she arrived here. It was only to be excused by saying she was English. She is a clever girl—very clever—but her manners are often detestable. Can't you see that?"

"No, I can't. At first she could not understand these Frenchmen, and was very 'stand-off' with them; but now they get on fairly well—as well as she could ever get on with that class of men. It is your sex in general,

Ally, rather than foreigners, she is on the defensive against. She has dropped things which make me believe that, young as she is, she has had some hard experiences. She has once or twice spoken of men in general very bitterly."

"Indeed!" He seemed more interested in the subject than he had yet been. "Such a mere girl! Do you know anything of her past?"

"Nothing, except that she is an orphan, and seems to have no one left in the world she cares a cent about. Sad, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said slowly, "it is sad; doubly so, because she will not make many friends. I am glad she has made one of you. You are so sensible."

"Ah! sense is rightly called *common;* and this girl is *un*common. She is not to be judged by ordinary standards. Her face is to me so interesting; so much more than beautiful."

"It is not the least beautiful; but it would paint well. It is an expressive face, and the expression I often see there is defiance."

"Yes, during the first few days she was here it was very marked; but I am sure that is growing less and less. She is reserved, of course. If I had not made the first advance to her, and almost insisted on making friends, I believe we should still be on the most distant terms. As it is, she never speaks of her family—never alludes to her childhood. But I have grown fond, really fond, of her. You say her face would paint well; why don't you ask her to sit to you?"

"Because I am very sure she would refuse. You

believe she is on the defensive against my sex. Well, I am not going to give her an opportunity of snubbing me. We are on very civil terms, but I shall not advance one inch from the position I have taken up. In the atelier she has told me to speak my mind, and I do so. Out of it, I mean to remain polite and distant."

His sister looked vexed; but there was no more to be said, and she wisely changed the subject.

Shortly after this, one afternoon in Hatty's atelier, Alaric happened to speak with contempt, generally, of the men in the pension before Miss Shaw.

"They are a miserable lot; each one talking of himself, and trying to belittle his neighbour."

Partly out of contradiction, I am afraid, Elizabeth said, "They amuse me rather; it is all so new. And as to what they *are*, I dare say they are not worse than other men. I dare say they are not, any of them, absolutely criminal."

"I don't know about that, I'm sure," returned Hatty's brother, in a tone which indicated that, in his opinion, the balance of probability lay the other way. "Narishkine, I should think, as likely as not, has an intimate acquaintance with dynamite."

"Is a man who risks his own life, when he destroys others, worse, I wonder, than one who destroys others, and sacrifices all—honour, everything—to work his own ends with impunity? I don't like Monsieur Narishkine; but I am not sure, if I were a Russian, that *I* should not be a Nihilist."

Hatty looked up through her *pince-nez*, at an angle of forty-five degrees, at the turbulent young person standing

beside her. Then she glanced at her brother. His eyes were riveted on Elizabeth.

"A woman was not intended to play the part of a destroying angel, I fancy, however just the cause,' he said slowly.

"No!" replied Elizabeth. "Of course you think, like all men, that her only part is to suffer—and to suffer in silence!"

"My expectation is not likely to be realized," he returned sarcastically. And then he left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

Is it happiness for a man to be constantly under the delusion that a woman—or, rather, a succession of women—are in love with him? Perhaps it tends to reconcile him to neglect, to want of appreciation from his own sex, from the world at large—which neglect is largely due, no doubt, to jealousy. Were it a single case of delusion, the rude awaking from that dream would bring with it much mortification; but when they follow as quickly as did Monsieur Anatole Doucet's, relieved by some facile successes, it is possible that vanity derives more gratification from such delusions than irritation when their unsubstantiality is proved.

Elizabeth, to whom the French "decadent" poet was a new experience—she had never met a poet of any description till now—"drew him out" during those first weeks of her stay at the pension, whenever she had an opportunity. He did not in the least attract, but he amused her. She talked more to him than to any other man, and, being what he was, it is not surprising that he mistook the nature of the attention she vouchsafed him. They only met in public; but at table, where he sat opposite, he stabbed her with those big blunt eyes of his,

and became persuaded that her bosom bled: slowly, perhaps, but the wound was mortal none the less. Sometimes, after dinner in the salon, he held forth to her on a variety of subjects, running his fingers through his tangled locks, and confident that he had found a fresh victim to his genius and personal allurements. The opportunities of a *tête-à-tête* were few, however, as Elizabeth sat so little in the public salon, and was busy nearly all day painting. But one evening his chance came, and he was not slow to seize it.

Madame Martineau announced at luncheon that a *baignoire* at the Théâtre Français had been sent her for that evening, and as the piece was "très convenable pour une jeune personne," she proposed to take Elizabeth with her. She invited Narishkine and Anatole Doucet to escort them, in return for some tickets which each of these gentlemen had lately given her. Elizabeth regretted that the Barings were not of the party, but she accepted the invitation. Fond as she was of a good play, however, it is probable that she would have declined the invitation, had she known that Madame de Belcour would, at the last moment, be substituted for Madame Martineau as a chaperon. The girl's dislike of the younger French woman had never diminished; but when Madame Martineau was taken ill during dinner, and begged Madame de Belcour to fill her place at the theatre, Elizabeth felt that it would be impossible to refuse to accompany her.

"I see there *is* some use in being married," she said, a little scornfully, to Hatty. "If 'Mrs.' were prefixed to your name, and you were thought to be deploring a

departed husband, you might be going with me instead of that woman."

"The prefix is dearly bought sometimes," replied Hatty, with a smile. "Husbands don't always depart readily when they don't suit."

Elizabeth said nothing. How dearly had she been very near paying for that prefix! It was doubly provoking, now that Madame Martineau had not invited the Barings instead of the two foreign men. How it would have simplified matters! for Hatty and she could have gone together with the brother's escort, which they could not with Narishkine and Doucet. The evening—still early in the autumn—was warm, so they walked to the theatre; Madame de Belcour and the Russian in front, Elizabeth and the poet behind. Doucet was a perpetual diversion to her; she could not take him seriously. His affectations seemed to the healthy-minded girl peculiarities to be treated indulgently, and swept away with not too heavy a hand. One could not break this butterfly on the wheel of grave reprehension. His crude theories, his denunciations of all law, his revolt against every received canon, whether of morals, or literature, or art, his enigmatical ravings, thinly bespattered with cleverness, made Elizabeth smile. It was to his credit, however, that he had never indulged at table in the sort of jokes which the elder men had vied with each other at first in making. But for this she would not have been so lenient to his absurdities. He was young, and he was French, and he had worshipped strange gods; not the fine old classic gods whom she had been taught to revere—Corneille and Racine, Montaigne and the rest—but men whose very

names had been unknown to her till now, and of whom their disciple spoke as though the language of true passion had never been heard till their voices rang through the world. They had not reached the sheltered places where Elizabeth had hitherto dwelt. She did not understand more than half of his wild jargon, and while he believed he was engraving an indelible impression on the English girl, she regarded him with amused toleration, and that pity which is far from being "akin to love."

The walk to the theatre, upon the whole, entertained her. She had never had so much consecutive conversation with the *fin-de-siècle* poet before. At table his talk was commonly a wild protest against all things as they are. He now began by vaunting the superiority of the Théâtre Libre over the obsolete, conventional Français—so fettered by scruples of propriety; so incapable of looking Nature straight in the face!

"This 'Mademoiselle de la Seiglière,'" he said, when they were ensconced in their box, "is, after all, very poor stuff. It is all *connu*."

"Have you ever written a play yourself—a play that can be acted?" asked Elizabeth, as she leant back, to avoid the chance of recognition.

"Yes; on the subject of Aholibah—a play that would just suit Sarah Bernhardt. How she would understand it! How she would feel the part! I can see her now, with her eyes fixed hungrily upon the wall."

"I am afraid I do not remember much about her. What is the story?"

"She falls in love with the pictures on the wall."

"That does not sound very dramatic. Do the pictures speak?"

"No—no!" he returned, impatiently. "The passion eats into her being. She becomes possessed by her love for those men whose pictures only she has seen. A splendid idea—so original!"

"More suited for a tableau, I should say. I thought a drama wanted action?"

"Oh! there will be action afterwards; but the subtlety of that situation in the first act will strike the keynote;" and he fixed his large onyx eyes upon her.

"I prefer modern subjects," observed Elizabeth. "I hate togas, and helmets, and Turkish trousers, and flowing robes on the stage. They alienate my sympathy."

"Passion," said the poet, "is of no age, no costume, no country. Bewigged men, like Corneille and Racine, make classic subjects dry, bloodless. It is given to us poets of the dying century to take those beautiful dead myths from their grave and clothe them with flesh, and give them passionate human voices. *Moi qui vous parle* shall do so!"

He ran his fingers through his dishevelled locks, and sought to burn her up with the ardour of his gaze. Elizabeth turned sharply round; the curtain was rising on the second act, and she fixed her eager eyes upon the stage. She was soon absorbed in the play; as little heedful of the intermittent conversation between Madame Belcour and Narishkine, as she was of the fact that a head far back in the orchestra stalls was watching her attentively.

Alaric Baring had left the pension soon after the

others. He had said nothing to his sister about going to the theatre; but he had followed them there, and had entered during the first act. He never left his seat; his eyes, indeed, remained resolutely fixed upon that box when they were not upon the stage. Between the second and third acts Madame Belcour took Narishkine's arm, and wandered out, whispering to Doucet as she left the box—

"She means you to remain. Make the most of your time, mon cher; and when we leave the theatre we will go on in front. You need not follow us too closely."

It facilitated his designs that the lady showed so little jealousy at the transference of his attentions, but possibly his vanity was slightly wounded thereby.

The play was over, and they all drifted out. There was a crowd at the door, and when they reached the open "Place," Madame de Belcour and Narishkine, who were in front, were not to be seen.

"They have walked on; we have but to follow them," said Doucet, as they crossed the Rue de Rivoli, and entered the court of the Louvre.

Still, looking across the wide expanse of asphalte and gravel, Elizabeth saw nothing of her companions. It did not trouble her much. It was a beautiful night, and the road home, she knew, was tolerably direct. She was brimming with enthusiasm about the play and the players, and wanted to pour it over some one. The poet was conveniently to hand. He offered her his arm, but that she declined. His brain—his perverted brain—was what she desired to reach. How could he pretend

to think that "Thérèse Raquin" and the like were superior to this pure, healthy story?

But heated argument was not what Monsieur Anatole Doucet sought at this moment. Sentiment, the fortuitous contact of congenial spirits, who soared far above the vulgar prejudices of the world,—these and cognate subjects were the fields over which he wished his eloquence to play. In the fervid exposition of his views on the whole duty of man and woman his pace waxed slow, and when, at the end of nearly half an hour, Elizabeth found herself in a dark and narrow street which was unknown to her, she stopped dead short, exclaiming—

"Where are we? Surely we should have reached the pension before this? We must have taken a wrong turning."

"I do not think so," he murmured—"if we continue straight on." Then, looking back, he saw a man's figure approaching—indeed, almost close upon them.

Elizabeth recognized him at the same moment.

"Why, Mr. Baring! How curious our meeting! Monsieur Doucet has literally lost his way!"

"So I see," observed the American, quietly.

"Of course!" the poet hurriedly cut in. "We have borne off too much to the left. I see now."

"Yes. It would have been better *to keep to the right.*"

"We must be near the Rue Cherche-Midi."

"Perhaps." Then turning to Elizabeth, "I do not lose my way about Paris, so you had better accept my guidance back to the pension."

The three walked side by side. Elizabeth talked most. Between the two men few words passed. Baring had

no desire to modify the scare which his sudden appearance had made upon the Frenchman. He had been suspected, he had been tracked, and his schemes, whatever they were, had been frustrated. He was horribly mortified, and swore vengeance at his heart against this blundering, meddlesome American. But he also swore that though the difficulties in his path might hereby be doubled, he would not be balked in his pursuit of the girl, who had dropped a spark on that inflammable bonfire he called his heart.

CHAPTER V.

"Was it not strange," said Elizabeth to her friend the next morning, "that your brother happened to be walking in that direction last night, and found us? I don't know how long we might have wandered about but for him."

"Yes, it was lucky he *happened* to be in that direction," returned Hatty, demurely.

She was secretly much pleased. Her quick intelligence divined the truth; but neither to Elizabeth nor to her brother did she hint her belief that he had followed them to the theatre. Things must be suffered to take their own course. That Alaric felt an interest in this English girl—let him say what he would—was clear. "Encouragement," as it is called, which means more or less of interference, would do more harm than good on both sides. The only point upon which she declared she could not hold her tongue was Elizabeth's toleration of Anatole Doucet.

"The moral of your adventure is—don't walk back from a theatre alone with a man who loses his way."

"You don't like my *décadent* poet," laughed Elizabeth, "who tells me he is writing a poem about me? I never

had a man write a poem about me before, and I should not be human if I were not touched." Then she stopped short, and looked grave. After a moment or two, she continued, "Of course I don't believe a word he, or any other man, says. David said all men were liars, and I know it is true. But it would be ridiculous to take a man like Anatole Doucet seriously. He does not mean—he does not know what he is saying, half the time."

"He knows pretty well the other half," said Miss Baring; "and if the half that is unreal is bad, the half that is real is worse."

Alaric's attitude towards Elizabeth was unchanged. He did not advance in intimacy—apparently he had no desire to do so—in consequence of the incident I have narrated. He named it casually to Hatty, solely, as she believed, in order to express his contempt of Doucet, and his amazement that her friend should tolerate the poet's attentions. She did not defend Elizabeth. On the contrary, she said with feminine artfulness—

"Miss Shaw seems very dense in some respects—has evidently no discernment. She believes all men are alike untrustworthy, and looks on this Frenchman as only a *poseur*—an extreme example of the national vanity and proneness to flatter."

"She seems to like it," he returned dryly. "I watched her a good deal during the evening."

Hatty could hardly repress a smile. "Yes; she owns it amuses her. She regards it as experience, I suppose."

"You had better tell her that some experiences are perilous," said her brother, as he turned away.

But Elizabeth had no notion of being debarred from what she regarded as an innocent diversion, by any hints Miss Baring might drop. She talked, with unembarrassed spontaneity, across the table; her lips twitched at the poet's affectations, his paradoxes, his foamings at the mouth. She regarded him much as certain men are regarded by an indulgent public in England: men whose superficial cleverness and puerile vanity entertain for an hour, and are forgotten; or, if not forgotten, are only remembered with a disparaging smile.

But there was to be an end to this indulgence; and the end was precipitated thus.

Elizabeth sat in her room late one night, writing her journal, before going to bed, when she was startled by a gentle knock at her door. It was locked; but she sprang up, and was about to open it, when she stopped short.

"Who is there?" she asked.

"It is I," replied Doucet's voice, in a whisper.

"What do you want?"

"I am very thirsty. Have you, mademoiselle, some water to give me?"

There stood a bottle on the table before her eyes. A few weeks since—before she fled from her uncle's house—she would assuredly have opened the door, and bade the young man quench his thirst. Though still singularly fearless, and too contemptuous to be seriously suspicious of M. Anatole, Hatty's warning possibly crossed her mind, as she replied—

"No. I have no water to give you, monsieur. You will find some downstairs."

"You are very cruel. If you knew what I am suffering!"

"There is fresh water in the dining-room."

"But I have something to say to you—something very particular, mademoiselle."

"You must say it in the morning."

"Oh! my head is on fire! I have just finished the poem I have addressed to you. Will you not hear it?"

"To-morrow. You shall read it to-morrow, Monsieur Anatole."

"Mon Dieu! How shall I pass this night? J'ai de bleus recueillements! Je réve le suicide! Je——"

"Don't be disagreeable, Monsieur Anatole, and talk nonsense. Go to bed. You can't stand outside my door all night and rave in this absurd way."

"Kill me, mademoiselle! Open the door, and kill me! It would be kinder!"

"Monsieur Anatole, if you do not go away instantly, I will never speak to you again."

She heard a plaintive murmuring as she closed the inner door of her bedroom; but whether he obeyed her at once, she never knew.

Monsieur Anatole Doucet was somewhat disconcerted when, at the midday meal the following day, this strange young woman asked him, before every one, whether he had found water to quench his thirst the previous night; and furthermore, whether he would read his poem before the assembled *pensionnaires* after breakfast. Thereupon a general chaffing of the poet ensued, in which every one joined, except Madame de Belcour, who looked indignant. He coloured and glared, and pushed back his distraught hair, and soon after left the table. The situation was seized, and variously commented on by all.

Mdme. de Belcour (*as soon as Miss Shaw and the Barings had returned to their studios*). "It is disgusting! She encourages him—any one can see how she encourages him—then she turns round and betrays him! Ce pauvre cher Doucet! To make him a laughing-stock, it is cruel—unfeminine! No woman with the common instincts of her sex would treat an admirer so!"

Prof. Genron. "If more women behaved so, madame, the world would not be populated with so many fools."

Mdme. Martineau. "She gave him a good lesson, at any rate. C'est d'un inconvenant! To come, uninvited, to a young girl's room! But he is a poet. C'est tout dit. Poets are made like that."

Narishkine. "He was rehearsing for the part of 'L'Amoureux Transi.'"

Dr. Morin (*laughing*). "He is young, and he is enterprising; and mademoiselle is able to take care of herself. But did you see the American's face when she opened her batteries on Doucet? He flushed—he bit his lip. I thought he was going to throw the *caraffe* at our poet's head!"

Mdme. de B. (*under her breath*). "Perhaps she was waiting for *him*. I should not wonder. C'est une fine mouche—allez!"

Prof. Genron (*grinning sardonically*). "Belief in virtue, I observe, is like faith. It must be inherent. It cannot be acquired."

Dr. Morin. "Till late in life. When we are too old to do much harm, some of us believe in our own virtue."

Mdme. M. (*throwing herself into a possible breach*). "Mes amis, I have to announce to you the arrival of a new pensionnaire—a young Englishman, who has been here this morning, and has taken my vacant room on the third floor."

Mdme. de B. "An Englishman? Bah! Ils sont tous bêtes."

Mdme. M. (*wagging her head*). "Il n'en a pas l'air, celui là. Il est bien, très bien, et élégant—tout à fait 'gentleman.'"

Narishkine. "Then we shall all hate him—that is, all the men. His name, Madame Martineau?"

Mdme. M. "Monsieur Georges. He comes to study painting."

Mdme. de B. "Poor, I suppose?"

Mdme. M. "Who knows? He has paid a week in advance."

Prof. Genron. "Those Americans will get hold of him."

Mdme. de B. "And that fine mouche!"

"Mr. George," with his fair fresh colouring, so rare in France, his blonde moustache of two months' growth, his immaculate clothes, his good spirits, and his winning smile, made a distinctly favourable impression on the ladies assembled at dinner that night. On the men, if the effect was less convincing, it was at least not one to rouse antagonism. He did not thrust himself into undue prominence; he spoke French with ease; he differed from his elders with a pretty air of deprecation calculated to disarm them. Even the cynical professor and the embittered Russian could find nothing worse to say in

his disfavour than that he had apparently been fed on buttermilk, "dans le Devonshire."

Elizabeth had no recollection of ever having seen him. In point of fact, she had only done so once, it may be remembered, in going through Mr. Twisden's office, two years before. On her last visit there, she had brushed past a young man on the stairs without even looking at him. His face now pleased her; it seemed to her frank and ingenuous; and his manner certainly contrasted favourably with that of every other man in the pension. She could not except Mr. Baring; she wished she could. She had the highest respect and, indeed, admiration for a great deal in the American's character, as revealed by Hatty; but he was difficult to get on with. He never "let himself go." This young Englishman, on the contrary, was prodigal of his personality. He talked freely, he laughed merrily; there was nothing *compassé* (to use Madame de Belcour's phrase) about *him*. Perhaps the contrast to her adored brother was too great to please Miss Baring. Certain it is that she was the only woman who was not greatly taken by Mr. George. She said rather crossly—as Elizabeth thought—that no one *could* be quite as candid as that young man looked.

Whether Alaric Baring conceived a prejudice thus early against the new-comer I cannot say, but it soon became apparent that a fresh cause for his irritation and his taciturnity was likely to arise. What with one thing and another, he was not having "a good time." The unspeakable Frenchman was, indeed, dropped into the limbo of things despised, no longer dreaded. But the very lightness with which she treated that whole episode

fortified his belief that the girl for whom he felt a growing passion—a passion against which he struggled vainly day by day, and which he sought to conceal from all the world, including the devoted Hatty—that this girl was vain and heartless. How otherwise could her conduct be accounted for? He had judged her to be proud, reticent, even contemptuous, when she arrived here, nearly three months ago. The barriers she had erected round herself had gradually broken down. He had seen with righteous indignation that they had yielded, after a while, to Monsieur Anatole Doucet's flattery, and he had feared greatly that this poetical cheap-jack would, with his good looks and his verses, make a real impression on the heart of the English girl. That dread was dispelled; but it was not to be denied that she had, up to a certain point, encouraged him—had played with him, as a cat does with a mouse, and had only dropped him when she had discovered that it was not always safe to play even with a mouse.

Yes, she was a coquette; there could be no doubt of it. He must be on his guard. Even towards himself, how wayward she was!—for it was thus he interpreted the fitful expansion and indifference of her manner. Had he been told that it was this very guardedness of his which often chilled the flow of the girl's utterance, and clouded her bright face in conversation, he would have been amazed. We often remain ignorant, to the end of the chapter, of the influence our manner—our outer being—has on the surface of others.

And now a new subject for disquietude had arisen. After the third or fourth day of Mr. George's presence

at the pension, it was manifest that here was a possible rival infinitely more to be feared than any "decadent" poet. Whatever else he might be, the new-comer was manly, exhilarating; the type of a healthy Englishman with keen wits, and a ready capacity for using them. His tact was amazing. He never rubbed any one up the wrong way, and his good humour was invincible. He was certainly attractive; Alaric Baring could not deny it. Had it not been for the sharp—too sharp—flash, now and again, in his light grey eyes—a flash which seemed to the American to reveal depths of possible cunning—he would have acknowledged that here was a man whose appearance and manner inspired absolute confidence. It was soon apparent that he had so inspired Miss Shaw. At all events, any one could see that his conversation pleased her. On the day after his arrival, he hired a studio in the same house as the Barings. He had considerable ability as a draughtsman, and opposed Alaric's theories as to the right way of looking at nature courteously, but with touches of a dry humour which delighted Elizabeth. Both the Barings saw with annoyance how much more congenial to her were Mr. George's views on art than their own. More than two months with them had not made her an impressionist. She still resolutely declared that it was not the impression, but the suggestion, of a face or hand which the artists of the new school delivered to one. The suggestion was often admirable, and seen a long, long way off, the effect became lifelike. But was it necessary to look at pictures such a long way off? She preferred the "impression" left by a Titian after his kind, or a Holbein after his. And now,

in support of such obsolete heresy as this, here was this healthy young Englishman, with his glibness and his suave manners, doing battle for Miss Shaw with the gloved hand of irony! It annoyed Hatty a good deal. But it annoyed her brother far more.

CHAPTER VI.

THE scene was Hatty's atelier, one afternoon at the end of the first week after Mr. George had arrived. The four sat there at tea. It had not been possible to avoid asking the young man to remain. He had come, at Elizabeth's invitation, to look at her study of an old peasant's head; and Hatty, for all her secret aversion for him, could not be so churlish as not to offer him a cup of tea. He took it as a matter of course. He was always delightfully at his ease; and Elizabeth clearly was already more so with him than with the imposing Alaric. He and his sister both felt this to be so.

Elizabeth. "How comes it, Mr. George, if you are a barrister——"

George. "Not a barrister—a solicitor" (*with a smile*).

Eliza. "Well, a solicitor, then — that you draw so well? You must have studied a great deal."

George. "I studied in the Slade School for some time. I hoped to become an artist, but my family persuaded me to give it up. I had an 'opening,' as it is called, offered me, and so I took to the law. A beastly profession, I dare say you think, Miss Shaw?"

Eliza. "No. Almost the only friend I have in the

world is an old solicitor." (Here she was on the point of asking him if he had ever met Mr. Twisden, but prudence stopped her.)

Baring. "In America we honour the law, and we have no invidious distinctions. No one *there* thinks it 'a beastly profession.'"

George (*laughing*). "We are adopting many American views, and none by which I shall benefit more than this."

Hatty. "The 'lawyer,' as we see him in old plays and novels, was once almost a synonym for trickery and falsity. The world is more liberal now."

George. "Is it? I don't know. Perhaps it has only changed its illiberality from professions to persons. Is not this a suspicious age? Certainly not one that takes the unknown on trust."

Baring (*dryly*). "Why should it?"

George (*smiling*). "Because we are such riddles to each other, even after years of 'knowing'—such tangled webs of good and bad—that we may as well take it for granted the man we know nothing of is not much worse, if he is not much better, than the rest of us."

Hatty. "We women believe in our intuition."

Eliza. "Oh! I don't trust mine—that is to say, I don't want to trust it."

Hatty. "But you do, my dear; and it is the weakest thing about you—your intuitive faculty. It will lead to your being called 'capricious;' I know it will. You conceive quite an erroneous idea of some one—you did so *lately*, you know—and then, when you find you were mistaken, you drop him. No, your intuitive faculty is weak."

Baring (*smiling grimly*). "You may allow Miss Shaw to have one redeeming weakness."

Eliza. "That is an ungenerous sneer at your sister's weakness for *me*, Mr. Baring! I could point Mr. George's moral; for nothing was known of me when I came here, and Hatty *did* take me on trust."

Hatty. "That is because I have intuition."

Eliza. "Not at all. None of you know anything about me. I am the tangled web of good and bad Mr. George talks of so poetically; but Hatty would only find the good if it were not for *you*," she added, laughing.

Baring (*with a forced smile*). "I have no intuitions—only observation."

George. "Are you not sometimes mistaken—misled by your observations?"

Eliza. "Mr. Baring never would own it. No man ever does."

Baring. "I beg your pardon, Miss Shaw. I was mistaken—I own it—about you at first."

Eliza. "Really? For better or for worse? I am curious to know."

Hatty. "Come, that is not fair, Elizabeth. I advise you, Alaric, not to answer that."

Baring. "Oh, I have no objection to answer Miss Shaw frankly. Observation, like certain drugs, is cumulative. First impressions are not observation, though they may be strengthened by it. Mine have been corrected in some respects."

George (*laughing*). "Is that a very frank answer? I should rather call it a very cautious one."

Eliza. "I can read between the lines."

Hatty (*quickly*). "Alaric leaves very little space between the lines. If one tries to see too much, one is apt to get puzzled."

Baring (*looking at no one, while he drinks his tea*). "You are giving yourself unnecessary trouble about my writing. It is of no importance to any one."

Eliza (*with a sudden irrepressible desire to be impertinent*). "Oh yes, it is, Mr. Baring! When a person talks as little as you, one is additionally curious to decipher his hieroglyphics; that is, to know what certain signs stand for. I am getting to know your signs—the disapprobation stops, the contemptuous flourishes. I really think I read your writing fairly well."

Baring (*coldly*). "Do you?" (*Then, after a moment's pause*) "Well, as I said just now, it is of no importance." (*Turning sharply round*) "Do you propose remaining any considerable time in Paris, Mr. George?"

George. "About six weeks altogether; that is my holiday. I want to see Fontainebleau. Have you been there, Miss Shaw?"

Eliza. "No. Madame Martineau proposed our going one day, before this fine September weather breaks; but I am afraid she wants to take the whole *boutique*. I should so much have liked to get some studies of rock and underwood there."

Baring. "Nothing to be done in a day."

George. "Why should we not make up a little party, and go there for three or four?"

There was a moment's silence. It was audacious of the young man, the new-comer, to propose it, perhaps; but audacity is sometimes rewarded. Elizabeth said she

should like nothing better, and looked interrogatively at Hatty. She, in turn, looked interrogatively at her brother.

Baring. "Do you feel strong enough?"

Hatty. "Certainly. Why not? There is no fatigue in sitting in the forest and sketching."

Baring. "I am afraid I have too much to do; but you and Miss Shaw can go together without me."

Hatty. "I should not think of doing so."

George. "I thought American young ladies were above such foolish prejudices."

Hatty (*tartly*). "It has nothing to say to prejudice, Mr. George. Miss Shaw and I could go together, or I could go alone, if it came to that. Simply, I do not choose to go without my brother."

Eliza. "It is a pity to make Mr. Baring accompany us —against his inclination."

Hatty. "Oh! it is all nonsense. He gets into a groove. It would do him good to be in the country for two or three days. Besides, he wants a background to his picture. He ought really to make some studies for it."

There was silence for the space of nearly a minute. It was felt that the autocrat was making his august decision. Then he said quietly, as he put down his cup—

"If we are to go—if you really wish it—it had best be to-morrow. The weather may change."

The result of those four days in the Forest of Fontainebleau justified Daintree's confident expectations. That astute youth had seen at once that the chief difficulty in his path would probably be this American, with his

proud sensitive nature. At present he felt pretty sure that Elizabeth's heart was not in danger, but there was no security that it might not become so. To exhibit Alaric Baring in the least attractive light, while making his own way as rapidly as possible in Elizabeth's favour, was now the most important thing. His own amiability, his good spirits and imperturbable temper, were perfect—might be said to be almost exasperating. Brought into constant friction with it, he foresaw that Alaric's temper would not stand the test. And he was right; he hardly realized how right at first.

His apparent light-heartedness, his intellectual versatility, even his physical agility, as he bounded over the rocks and leapt the streams in their wanderings through the forest, irritated Baring. Limited to a trial of strength, whether of brains or of muscle, the American did not misdoubt his own powers; but neither with tongue nor with limb was he nimble. The fire within was kindled, indeed, but he spake not. He had never shown to greater disadvantage than he did during those four days

He was annoyed for feeling—what he indubitably did feel—jealous of this Englishman. What business was it of his if Miss Shaw chose to flirt with Mr. George? —for thus he designated the lively interchange of talk between the two. What could it signify to *him*, Alaric Baring, blessed with an income of a thousand dollars over and above what he might earn with his brush, if the girl chose to encourage the attentions of a man whom he now regarded with mistrust? If he loved her ever so, Alaric could never marry her himself; and he tried hard to persuade himself that he had no desire

to do so. He did not quite succeed in this. His introspection was too acute, and, it may be added, too ruthless, for him to shut his eyes to the humiliating knowledge that he was more and more attracted by a woman of whom he had formed no very high opinion. She was vain, contradictory, and much too fond of admiration. Theoretically, this was the last woman he would have expected to find himself drawn towards. Practically, it was with difficulty he could drag his thoughts into any other channel at this time. And Hatty never helped him. On the contrary, though she abstained from overt praise of her friend, the deep interest she felt in her was often shown in little unexpected ways. His sentiments on this subject were curiously mixed. He was annoyed, and yet he was glad, that his sister, so unimaginative and undemonstrative, should have conceived this admiration for the girl. To the hard, critical side of his mind, it seemed unaccountable; to the sensitive, unreasoning side, it was consolatory. He was not alone. The strange fascination which Miss Shaw exercised over him was felt by his sister, who was dearer to him than any one else in the world.

But even to her he strove not to betray himself. He was humiliated in his own eyes; he would not be humiliated in hers, if he could help it, by acknowledging his weakness. He must wrestle with it; he must conquer it. No strong man should yield himself captive to such a passion as this. The girl had small belief in men; she treated them all alike as sport. With him, indeed, she had not tried; but that, perhaps, was because he had not given her the opportunity. Still, it was clear that his

society was distasteful to her. In his presence she never seemed at ease—unless her occasional impertinences went to prove that it was intentional slight, and not shyness, which made her avoid conversation with him.

Irritated with others, contemptuous of himself, it was inevitable that he should grow more and more taciturn every day. In proportion as George was vivacious and good-tempered, Alaric was curt in manner and unconciliatory in his replies. Hatty suffered acutely. To that devoted sister those four days were days of pain. Far from her brother making his way, he had lost ground, when brought into hourly contrast with this odious, smiling Englishman. Alaric could not deceive her—he was in love with the girl; but he was showing so very much the worst side of his character, that it was impossible that Elizabeth should recognize its great worth and nobility. It was most provoking. She wished Mr. George had never come to the pension. She wished they had never come to Fontainebleau. The last afternoon there put the finishing touch to her misery; she caught cold sitting on the damp grass, and returned to Paris feeling really ill.

Elizabeth's entry in her journal that evening shows her mind at this time better than I could do it in my own words.

"I have written nothing here for four days—too tired each night to enter my impressions. The weather has been beautiful. I made three sketches in the forest, which Mr. George declared to be excellent, and which I really believe myself are good. Mr. Baring said nothing; but Mr. George sees nature more as I do. Besides, Mr.

Baring was not in good form. He certainly is not an amiable man; he was once or twice almost rude to Mr. George. Neither was Hatty in very good temper. Dear Hatty! Her health is sufficient excuse for her; and I don't mind her snapping my head off now and then, for I am really fond of her. Indeed, I am sure I never liked any woman so much before. But now and then she is captious, and she has been so during these four days. Perhaps this is enough to account for my not having enjoyed myself as much as I expected. Mr. George was very pleasant; I don't know how I should have got on without him. He has a temper that would turn sour milk sweet again, and like the man in Chevalier's song, he has 'no airs nor affect-ai-tions'! He seems straightforward, and clean inside and out. Why is it that he doesn't interest me more? Because, like his face, he is too pink and spotless? I should be sorry to think I had any proclivity to grime. No, it is not that. He is by no means insipid and soapy. He is, on the contrary, clever and lively, self-controlled, self-sufficing—*too* self-sufficing: that is it. I cannot imagine his ever falling in love; though I am not sure he would not like me to believe him capable of it. All men, or nearly all, are alike. They flirt with every girl they meet; heart has nothing to say to it. The grim American is an exception; no one can accuse *him* of wanting to flirt. If he did, I doubt if I should respect and admire him as much as I do. Such is the contradiction of woman's nature—of my nature, at all events. Mr. B. is the only man who ever intimidates me, until I get provoked. Then I say something tart and impertinent, which I regret the next moment. His look

of silent reproof, as he strokes the reddish beard with those long thin fingers, smites me like a physical blow. Why should I mind what he thinks? He has a very poor opinion of me, I know; he never conceals it. For his sister's sake he tolerates me; but he looks on me as a frivolous and wilful young woman, not worth talking to. Perhaps, if I submitted to his opinions in everything, he might condescend to do so. But I have no idea of doing that. It is doubtful, indeed, if we should ever get on well, our ideas on most subjects, beginning with art, being so diametrically opposed. He was right about Anatole Doucet: I grant that. I treated the reptile as though he had no fang; the man divined that he had one. But, because he chooses to dislike this nice, harmless Englishman, am I not to amuse myself in his society? Am I to lose all right of private judgment in deference to the views of a man of whom I may say I know very little, though we have been in daily intercourse for more than two months? I have written that I 'admire' him, nevertheless. Why? Because, with all his faults (foremost among them that he does not appreciate *me!*), I am conscious that there is something grand about him, different from any other man I have yet known. He is careless about the opinion of others; takes no pains to conciliate any one; but his devotion to Hatty, which prevents his travelling, shows his unselfishness; and I feel sure he is incapable of a sordid or ignoble action. One thing I am now sure of. His meeting me that night, when I had fallen into the trap laid for me by Monsieur Doucet, *was not accidental.* He divined, or obtained knowledge of, the plot in which I half suspect Madame de

Belcour of being an accomplice, and his natural chivalry impelled him to defeat it. But he came to my rescue without any flourish of trumpets. He helped me as he would have helped any other woman in like circumstances; and I was, moreover, his sister's friend. Not even to her did he confess the real truth. He wished it to be considered 'an accident.' But I saw she did not believe it. Neither do I. He is an odd man. If he had the smallest personal regard for me, his conduct on this occasion would be divested of its singularity, at all events. For a man to take all this trouble for a woman who is rather obnoxious to him than otherwise, is fine. I am justified in saying I 'admire' him."

After writing this she closed her book, and sat for the best part of an hour motionless, her head resting between her hands. The church clocks had struck midnight before she was in bed.

CHAPTER VII.

ELIZABETH sat by Miss Baring's bedside the following day.

"I am not going to rise," she said; "my cough is too troublesome, and all my limbs ache."

"It was imprudent of you sitting out so late in the forest. I wonder your brother allowed it. If I had been near you I should have remonstrated."

"Ah! you were too much engrossed." This was said, in a low but sharp voice, between her fits of coughing.

"Yes, I was anxious to finish my last study of rock, I confess. But Mr. Baring being so near you——"

"Oh! Alaric was engrossed too, for that matter."

"When one is sketching, one does not think, does one?"

"No; it was my own case. But though you were not close to me, I could not have gone away and left you alone in the forest."

"I was not alone. Mr. George was with me."

"A nice protector! A man who was a stranger to you five days ago, and whom you know absolutely nothing of!"

"What does one know of any one?—of any *man*, I mean?"

Hatty looked scarlet and indignant, but that may have been due to her violent cough.

"For instance," continued Elizabeth, taking advantage of her friend's inability to speak, "I am not stupider than most other women, and I know very little of your brother, after nearly three months' acquaintance."

"It is your own fault," gasped Hatty.

"No, I deny that. He doesn't wish me to know him. You are always trying to make him like me, but it is of no use. One can't fight against that sort of prejudice."

Miss Baring sat up in bed, and leant forward, pressing her face close to Elizabeth's, as she said—

"How blind you are!" Then she sank back on her pillow. After a little pause, she continued, "Alaric dislikes to see you wasting yourself on such society as Monsieur Doucet's or Mr. George's."

"What is there against Mr. George? I give up Monsieur Doucet—but Mr. George? A clever, inoffensive young man, with good spirits, but never an attempt at familiarity," she flared up.

"He has not a face to be trusted."

"Come, that is prejudice, if you will! There is a fine healthy robustness about the man at variance with anything underhand."

"I caught him fingering all the letters that had arrived the other morning."

"He wanted to see if there was one for himself, I suppose."

"He was examining one in a suspicious way, as if he wanted to open it, and dropped it as he caught sight of me."

The girl laughed aloud.

"It is *you* who have a suspicious way, Hatty! Your imagination is fed by your determination to see everything the poor young man does *en noir*. His curiosity would have a small field to exercise itself upon with *me*. I don't receive more than one letter a month."

"You did receive a letter that morning, however, for you told me so. You mentioned that there had been a very heavy storm in London."

"Oh! from my old solicitor-friend. Not a correspondent who would arouse jealousy, supposing it possible that Mr. George suffered from the complaint. But do disabuse your mind, Hatty, of all this nonsense. Mr. George has no curiosity about me. He has never asked me a question."

"He is too sharp. However, it is no use discussing him; we shan't agree. Go to the atelier. I have talked enough. It makes me cough."

The letter from Mr. Twisden, to which reference was here made, was unimportant, but contained one passage of more moment than Elizabeth attached to it. It ran thus—

"Lord Robert Elton called on me yesterday, chiefly, I apprehend, to ask if I could give him any information as to your present whereabouts. I need hardly say that in this he did not succeed. At the same time, I was greatly impressed by his evident anxiety on the subject. He said that he had been much distressed, and so had her Grace, at learning that you had left your uncle's house, to escape —it was whispered in the county—being coerced into a

marriage against your inclinations. The gossip of servants, added to the reticence of Mr. and Mrs. Shaw as to your movements (they say you are 'visiting friends'), has led to this report, no doubt. I could neither confirm nor deny it; but I confess, my dear Miss Shaw, to feeling a strong desire to relieve her Grace's mind and that of Lord Robert as to your safety, your present refuge, and your designs for the future."

He had, in point of fact, dropped, unintentionally, several hints on these subjects. Miss Shaw was abroad; she was in a great city; she was studying; she had persons of congenial tastes near her. The shrewd young man with an obstinate lip had not forgotten part of a conversation with the heiress when he was at Farley. He had no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that the study was painting; the city, either Dresden or Paris. If the former, it would be easy to run her to earth; if the latter, it might be difficult. Still, as being the nearer, he would try it first. And so, a few days later, he arrived at Meurice's Hotel. An examination of the strangers' list at every known hotel and at Galignani's, together with inquiries at the British Embassy and at sundry bankers, proving fruitless, he had made up his mind to leave Paris that night for Dresden, when it occurred to him that there was just a chance, if she were here, of finding her in the Gallery of the Luxembourg. He had been more than once to the Louvre, but the modern pictures across the Seine he had not yet visited.

Elizabeth, though living so near it, had only been there three times since her arrival, and she always chose to do so at the earliest hour that the gallery was open,

when strangers were rare. A fatality willed that Hatty—it was about ten days after their return from Fontainebleau—should ask Elizabeth to accompany her to the Luxembourg on this particular morning. It was the first time she was out since her severe cold; she did not feel strong enough to work in her atelier, but said she was just equal to crawl across the garden in the mid-day October sunshine after *déjeuner*, and sit down opposite two or three of her favourite pictures for an hour or so. Alaric had gone to his work; but Mr. George, much to Miss Baring's annoyance, proposed to accompany the two ladies. Elizabeth, knowing her friend's dislike to the young Englishman, assured him they required no escort. When, however, he replied with the sweetest smile, "Of course not; but will you not allow me to have the pleasure of seeing the pictures and discussing them with you?"—what could she reply.

The air had the first touch of frost in it, though the sun shone still warmly among the red leaves which silently detached themselves from the boughs, and drifted down, turning the yellow gravel paths to crimson. The thin edge of the air made the American girl cough. By the time they had ascended the narrow stair which leads to the saloons of the old historic palace, she was exhausted, and sank down on the first seat.

"Go on," she said to Elizabeth. "Don't mind me. I will join you presently, when I am a little rested."

It was the first time since they left Fontainebleau that George found himself alone with the object of his quest. In public, he was cautious not to single her out for his attention. At table, and in the salon, he talked even

more to Madame de Belcour; and the two older ladies were loud in praise of the young Englishman's agreeability and *petits soins*. But now, for a few minutes at least, he had the field to himself, unshadowed by any necessity for cautious tact or dissimulation. And it must never be forgotten, in our dealings with George Daintree, that, money-bags apart, he was really attracted to Elizabeth Shaw.

He began, "Living, as we do, in the pension, is a great school of discipline, I find."

"Why so? I don't understand."

"In London I lead a very lonely life. I have no one to consider but myself, and an old uncle of mine. I go to the people I like; the others I leave alone. Here, one is forced to associate with a number of people one does not care about, and try to be pleasant to all."

Elizabeth laughed. "I am sure that is your principle through life, Mr. George. I am afraid I am not like that. I didn't try to be pleasant here at all at first. I am wiser now. With one or two exceptions, they are good natured and amusing."

"And you have some real friends among them. I have none. Your friends dislike me—I know it. You must not let them prejudice you against me, Miss Shaw."

She smiled a little. "I am not easily prejudiced by others—not easily enough, perhaps. No one can help likes and dislikes."

"Certainly not. And I should not complain of Miss Baring's dislike if I were not afraid that she may influence you. I don't know what I have done to annoy her—unless it be that I differ from her brother on

subjects of art. My conduct here, I am sure, has been immaculate. You are the only person I wished to talk to, but I have avoided making you conspicuous, knowing what a hotbed of gossip the pension was."

Elizabeth was resolved to glide off on to the impersonal surface of this speech, and not to be induced to cut any figures of eight with this adroit skater—on very thin ice.

"You and I agree very well about art, Mr. George—much better than I do with Mr. Baring. I do not see nature as he does, and to me it seems that completion is not incompatible with breadth. He tries with infinite pains to produce the effect of sketchiness. I do not believe the greatest men of any time ever did that."

"As Ruskin said of a much greater man than Baring, 'He flings his paint-pot in the face of the public.' That sort of thing is all affectation."

"Mr. Baring is not affected," said Elizabeth, quickly. "He is entirely sincere in his views."

"I was speaking of the school, not of Mr. Baring. I have no wish to discuss him. I had rather speak about yourself. Will you treat me as a friend, and tell me how long you intend remaining in Paris?"

"All the winter."

"You will not move further south?"

"I have no idea of doing so at present."

"I may be called back to England in a day or two."

"Really? You have not been here more than three weeks!"

"My holiday was only for six, and I have a letter this morning which renders it probable that I may be wired for. But, if my leave is curtailed, I believe—that is to

say, I hope very much that I may be able to return in the winter. I would certainly do so"—he looked her full in the face—"if I knew that my presence here again would not be thought objectionable by you."

It shot through Elizabeth's mind as he spoke, "Here is a man who, in his own calm, unimpassioned way, cares *something* for me. It may not be much. It will not give him a heartache, probably. But at least the care is not mercenary." She said aloud—

"If you should return to Paris, and that I am here, Mr. George, I shall be glad to see you."

"You will count me, then, among your friends?"

"I don't know you well enough as yet to call you a *friend*. It means so much, and I am slow to make new ones."

"I hope I may become one in time. I shall not despair. What is your scheme of life—if you have one?"

"I have none at present. The next few months will decide whether I have enough talent to make painting my profession."

He checked the rejoinder, and the smile that played about his mouth.

"Painting," he said, "is a willing slave, a hard task-master."

"I had rather have any master, than drift through life idle and purposeless."

"Need you drift 'purposeless' in England? Have you no wish ever to make your home there?"

"Perhaps, by-and-by—a long time hence. At present I hate the thought of England." Then turning suddenly,

as if to dismiss a subject she had no desire to pursue further, "How beautiful is that 'Naïade' of Henner's! Not a mere realistic treatment of a model. The old painters thought like that. So do Watts and Burne-Jones. But most of these Frenchmen's so-called 'nymphs' are dreadful to me."

He did not reply. He had turned suddenly pale, and his eyes were fixed on a figure which had just entered the gallery at the further end. Several visitors had come in just before. Miss Shaw's back was turned towards them all; she was absorbed in contemplation of Henner's "Naïade." George recognized Lord Robert Elton instantly; he knew him well. He knew, too, his lordship's pursuit of Elizabeth. He divined at once the object which brought him to Paris. What was to be done? If Elton came up to them unprepared, discovery of George's secret was inevitable. With the rapidity of decision which might almost be called genius, he walked quickly down the room, and met Elton advancing towards him, his hand extended.

"How are you, Mr. Daintree? Little thought to meet you in Paris."

"I am here in a pension. Miss Shaw——"

"Is that Miss Shaw, with her back towards us?"

"Yes. Miss Shaw is in the same pension. But I am a stranger to her. She does not know my name. May I ask you, as a favour, not to mention it? To her I am 'Mr. George.' She would resent the idea of being watched over by any one. She wishes to remain absolutely unknown."

"So I understand. Absurd! You are acting as a

kind of sentinel over her, then? Odd women are! Like mystery—otherwise why should she? Of course, I am going to speak to her. But I'll respect your wish to remain *incognito*. Saw your uncle a few days ago."

"He did not give you any clue to Miss Shaw's abode?"

"Not wittingly. Guessed she was painting somewhere. Who is that with her? Another painting-woman?"

"Yes. A Miss Baring—American."

"Miss Shaw turns her head. She sees us—recognizes me—must go and speak to her;" and he walked quickly down the room, followed by Daintree.

Elizabeth's surprise was anything but pleasant, and she showed it. She was tracked, then; and all the pains she had been at to remain undiscovered were frustrated by this act of indiscretion on her part. At first it did not occur to her that their meeting was the result of anything but accident. Afterwards she remembered that passage in Mr. Twisden's letter which referred to Lord Robert. She felt sure her old friend would not intentionally betray her, but he might have dropped a word which had led the young man to suspect that she was in Paris. And in her first annoyance at recognizing him, the curious coincidence that he should be on cordial terms with Mr. George was overlooked.

Elton shook hands with her, as though it were the most natural thing in the world that they should meet thus.

"So you have carried out your idea of coming to Paris to study, Miss Shaw? Quite right to keep yourself

dark—from Embassy and so on—interferes with work. But to your friends, it won't do—it won't, really."

Hatty had seen her friend's face. It was enough to tell her that this encounter was distasteful to Elizabeth. But, whatever the cause, Hatty felt instinctively that it was better she should be out of earshot. Miss Shaw's reticence about all that concerned herself made the American girl additionally scrupulous not to appear inquisitive. She walked on.

Elizabeth took his hand before she spoke.

"I find it 'does' very well, Lord Robert. You have met me, by accident, here; I hope you will be kind enough not to mention it to any one. You are only passing through Paris, I suppose?"

"On the contrary, I mean now to remain some weeks."

"Promise, then, to forget that you have met me—please do."

"Quite impossible. But I'll promise to tell no one where you are."

"Especially my uncle?"

"Certainly. May I say I think you have made a great mistake in going off like this? Food for idle gossip. Always a mistake to give food for idle gossip. However, no business of mine."

"No one can judge but myself in this case," returned the girl, quickly.

"Quite right. Beg pardon. No opinion worth anything without knowing all the facts. Still, to go by yourself to this pension——"

"How did you find out——?" she began, then stopped.

"I see. Mr. George—you know him? How curious!"

"Yes, I know him. I am going to try if I can get into your pension myself."

"*You?* In our pension? Oh! Lord Robert, what on earth will you do there? We are nearly all hard workers there; busy all day long."

"So shall I be. Think I can't work hard? Long wanted to study French jurisprudence. Slack time now. Not wanted by my constituency. Just fit in."

"I am afraid you will not like the people at the pension."

"Shan't I? What does it signify? I shall have you —and—Mr. George—to talk to."

"I must tell you frankly you will see but little of *me*. Except for my meals, I am rarely in the public rooms."

"You will relax your rule a little in my favour, I hope. Who are you working with?"

"I have begun with Monsieur D——. His class is only just reopened. Hitherto I have been painting from models in Miss Baring's studio."

"That girl? Much of a performer? Looks very ill."

"She is delicate. A charming person, but she does not paint remarkably well. I must rejoin her. If you do come to our pension, may I ask you to say nothing about me? *Nothing*. Do you understand?" Then, with a sudden and happy audacity, she added, "I have escaped from Farley to avoid mercenary people, who made up to me because I am an heiress. I don't want the same thing to begin again here. I am supposed to have taken up painting as a profession. Will you remember that? Good-bye."

"Till dinner-time only, I hope. Secret's safe with me."

George was standing a little way off. Lord Robert joined him, muttering to himself—

"Deuced queer! Like a masquerade. I suppose I had better put on a domino also, and drop the lordship. But if she thinks she can shake me off so easily—no!"

Then aloud to Daintree—

"Give me the address of your pension, *Mr. George.* I suppose they'll take me in. Better call myself *Mr.* Elton—eh?"

The younger man stared at him for a moment in sheer consternation. Then, seeing that he would betray himself to the astute politician if he hesitated, or threw any obstacle in the way of Mr. Elton's acquiring the information he desired, Daintree gave the address, adding—

"Whether there is a vacant room I cannot say. If so, it is at the top of the house. Not very comfortable, I fear."

Lord Robert thanked him, wrote down the name and the address, and straightway departed. That which he was minded to do he did always, without loss of time.

Elizabeth was in a state of revolt, as she rejoined Miss Baring. It was intolerable that she should be hunted down thus. The aristocratic politician, with his dominant airs and elliptical utterance, was all very well in his proper place. She had no objection to his society in England, though she could not but secretly despise a man whom she knew to be mercenary, let Mr. Twisden say what he would. But that he should pursue her to Paris, and now on to Madame Martineau's—for, of course, she could not be deceived by that plea of studying French law

—was extremely annoying. Bohemia was not his sphere; he would be horribly out of keeping with all his surroundings; he would not understand them, nor they him; and his attitude towards herself might exasperate her to the point of rudeness, she foresaw.

Hatty was seated, looking white and exhausted, as her friend approached. She asked no question, but read Elizabeth's discomposure in her face.

"That was an acquaintance whom I would have given a great deal not to have met—and I should not have met him if I hadn't come here stupidly at this hour," she said.

"I am sorry! It was my fault!"

"Oh, *you* couldn't tell, Hatty! It was no one's fault but mine. And the worst of it is, he declares he is coming to take a room at Madame Martineau's!"

There was a quick gleam of intelligence in the American girl's eyes, behind her glasses.

"In that case, I suppose I may ask what his name is?"

Elizabeth hesitated a moment; and her hesitation did not pass unobserved. Then she said, "Elton."

"What is he come here to do?"

"He says to study French jurisprudence."

"Is he clever?"

"Yes. He took honours at Oxford, has read for the Bar, and has now taken up politics."

"And you do not like him? Why?"

"I don't say I dislike him. I didn't want to meet him—that's all. I came here to work, and I don't want to meet any one."

"Let us go home, then," she said with a smile, "for fear we should meet any one else."

"The evil is done. It is most unlikely I should meet any one else I know—though more curious things than that happen. Fancy Mr. George knowing him, too! Such an odd coincidence! Here he comes."

Mr. George's brow was clouded. He looked meaningly into Elizabeth's face.

"It was a surprise, meeting *Mr.* Elton here." They exchanged glances. "Do you think he will be a pleasant addition to our party?"

"I had rather he were not coming."

"You think he won't be 'in his plate,' as the French say?"

"There are really so many plates," interposed Miss Baring, "that I should say he might find *one* to suit him."

"There is no political plate. He is nothing if not oratorical. Do you care for oratory, Miss Shaw?"

"I don't know if I do or not. I never heard any. When do you expect to be recalled to England, Mr. George?"

Miss Baring looked up quickly. "Are you really going?"

"Possibly. I shall know to-morrow or next day. I am afraid you will not weep at my departure, Miss Baring," he added, with a laugh.

"I am not given to weeping," she replied.

Elizabeth felt her heart rather softened. Certainly the young man was not mercenary. So far, he was better than this tiresome pertinacious lord. She said nothing, but walked off to a distant picture; and he followed her. Miss Baring also followed, but more slowly.

"Why do you remain in Paris, Miss Shaw?" he said

quickly. "You see, it is as difficult to avoid people here as it would be in London. If you lived in Bloomsbury, and attended the Slade School——"

"Good gracious! The Slade School again! No, Mr. George. I prefer Paris, and mean to remain here."

Then Miss Baring came up, and no more passed.

CHAPTER VIII.

George Daintree had only spoken the truth when he told Elizabeth that he might possibly be called back to England. The bankers had forwarded to him that morning a letter from his uncle, saying that he had a fit of the gout, and was once more a prisoner to the house. Mr. Twisden wrote that, if he was not better in the course of a few days, he must ask George to return, and take the remainder of his holiday later.

The young man had meditated for several days letting his uncle know some portion of the truth as regarded himself. The whole truth, in its naked ugliness, he had no intention of revealing. But the wisdom of the serpent was his. He saw that if he did not present the truth to Mr. Twisden becomingly draped, he ran the risk of a discovery, which would greatly shock the old man, and destroy his confidence in his nephew for ever. The moment had come when he must speak, or run this risk. The events of that morning decided him. He did not think that Lord Robert would betray his secret, but it might ooze out. It was imperative, therefore, in writing to his uncle, to apprise him of his position relative to two persons in whom Mr. Twisden, he knew, was interested.

On reaching home that afternoon he sat down at once, and this is what he wrote—

"No —, Rue de ——, Paris, 6th October.

"My dear Uncle,

"Your letter, which gave me real concern, reached me this morning; sooner, I fancy, than you anticipated, for I am, as you see, still in Paris. Before I explain to you how this has come about, let me say that I await your next with impatience, and shall be ready to return to Gray's Inn at a few hours' notice, if I hear that you are still incapacitated from going there. Indeed, whether or no, you have but to send me a wire, and I start at once.

"Painting, as you know, is my favourite pursuit; and I left London fully determined to work hard in Paris for a few weeks, by which I believed I could gain more than by mountaineering in Switzerland. I said nothing to you of my resolve, fearing that you would disapprove, and try to dissuade me. Accident led me, when looking for a room in the Artists' Quarter here, to a pension, where I found—whom do you think? No other than Miss Shaw. She did not remember my face (indeed, she only saw me once); but, as she might remember my name, and as I had no right, or desire, to disturb her tranquillity by revealing myself as your nephew, I called myself *Mr. George*, and as such she knows me. Your mind may be at ease about the young lady. She is well in health, much improved in looks, and seems perfectly happy in working hard every day. Her great friends in the pension are an American and his sister, named Baring. But a

new inmate has arrived to-day, who, judging by the expression of Miss Shaw's face, when she first saw him in a picture-gallery this morning, is not very welcome. What do you say to Lord Robert Elton? How did he learn Miss Shaw was in Paris? For I feel confident it is in pursuit of her he is come. Chance has befriended him. He happened to meet her, and has now secured a room in this pension. I believe you support his suit; but, to tell you the truth, I do not think he has the ghost of a chance. I hope to have a much better report of you in reply to this. But, whether you are better or not, let me repeat that I am ready to return at once, if you wire that you wish for me.

"Your affectionate nephew,
"GEORGE DAINTREE."

And in this he was quite sincere. All that he had he owed to his uncle, and he was really fond of the old man. This did not prevent his hatching a plot which he knew Mr. Twisden would never sanction. But it impelled him to write as he now did, offering to return at once; though, if this offer had not been prompted by genuine feeling, in the first instance, the wisdom of the serpent once again would have suggested, as it now ratified, the propriety of the step. The capture of Elizabeth was only a possibility; he did not deceive himself on this head. The succession to Mr. Twisden was a certainty, if he and his uncle remained on the close terms they were now on.

Madame Martineau was in the seventh heaven at her last remaining room being taken. In honour of the new boarder she put a fresh mauve riband into her cap, and

ordered an extra *plat doux* for dinner. Before that meal, the intelligence had penetrated every room in the house, and had aroused curiosity to know what the new inmate was like. The men were disappointed, first, that it was not a woman, in that over-manned establishment; secondly, that it was another Englishman, in which patriotic sentiment Madame de Belcour joined, with affected enthusiasm. In reality, she cared not from what seas were the fish that came to her net. She had not captured either of the two English-speaking men who were boarders at Madame Martineau's, one of whom conspicuously avoided her; the other, while generally polite and agreeable, did not offer up to her the exact sort of incense her vanity and her passions craved. The inhabitants of *perfide Albion* were all alike cold-blooded, she affirmed, while nourishing a secret hope that the new-comer might prove an exception to the rule. She put on her pale blue dress, trimmed with *chiffon*, which both Morin and Anatole Doucet had affirmed to be the most becoming of her many costumes. With the faintest touch of rouge (she was too clever to rouge persistently), and her keepsake air, she felt herself to be irresistible. But when Elton entered—*mon Dieu!* what a blow! She liked height and strength in a man. What pleasure could there be in enslaving a creature like this, with narrow shoulders and undecided legs, surmounted by a keen, ugly face, glazed in with a *pince-nez?* Not thus had she pictured the physical man of this son of Albion. Mr. George was a far more desirable possession; and as to America's red-bearded representative, he had every personal requisite for a hero, in the lady's eyes. But this Mr. Elton——!

He sat between her and Professor Genron, who ceded with cynical alacrity his place at the lady's right. Elizabeth, consequently, was directly opposite to him. Miss Baring was too tired to appear at dinner, but her brother occupied his usual seat. Elton spoke French admirably, and not being afflicted with shyness, sent his snap-shots in every direction across the table. He avoided, with commendable tact, making Elizabeth the direct recipient of most of these shots, though, by ricochet, many of them struck her.

Madame Martineau had asked him, with her sweetest smile, if he knew Paris well.

"Yes—the English quarter. Very little this side the river. Came here with a special object." Elizabeth winced inwardly, but he did not look at her, and turning to Genron, shot on rapidly, "You are a professor at the Sorbonne, I understand? I want to know something of French law. Any lectures there I can attend?"

Genron. "Certainly; but Monsieur Bertrand, the young man at the further end of the table, can tell you more about them. He is a law-student."

Elton (*looking down the table and catching Bertrand's eye*). "Perhaps you will be good enough to give me some information by-and-by. French oratory remarkable—Berryer unsurpassed. We English, with few exceptions, poor orators."

George (*smiling as he leans forward*). "We know exceptions, do we not, Miss Shaw?"

Genron (*sarcastically*). "The English are a silent people; their tongues seem mostly tied."

Elizabeth (*colouring*). "It is a pity that foreigners sometimes are not so."

Mdme. de Belcour (*with a languid smile*). "That is meant for you, Dr. Morin. The doctor is my favourite orator. So sympathetic!"

Elton. "You speak in public? Where can I hear you?"

Dr. Morin (*laughing*). "Nowhere, monsieur. It is only to tease me your fair neighbour says that. I never speak."

Mdme. Martineau. "He never speaks! Listen to him! He never speaks! Ho, ho!"

Morin. "I make myself understood, and you are good enough to listen; but as to oratory—bah!"

Mdme. Clinchaut. "Ah! oratory is not what it was. I heard Lamartine in the Chamber. Ah! it was poetical. There is nothing like it now—nothing!"

Doucet. "Pardon, madame. If you talk of *poetical* eloquence, allow me to say I gained the first prize for poetical oratory at college—an improvisation; the subject was 'Suicide.' And now, if there were a revolution, should I not be a Mirabeau, a Camille Desmoulins? I believe you. Talk of our oratory being deteriorated; it is only now we are awaking to what true oratory is!"

Mdme. Clinchaut (*shaking her head sarcastically*). "Lamartine was good enough for me."

Baring (*who has caught Elton's eye, slowly, in English*). "Some of our men in Congress would make them sit up here."

Elton. "Your Webster—a great orator! But these French—wonderful, wonderful! Such fluency!"

Baring. "And self-confidence." (*In French*) "Le Père Didon is the most eloquent man I have heard here."

Genron. "Bah! If you go to the churches" (*with a shrug*), "they will tickle your ears; they will make a picture for you with all their fluid colours. But of hard reason, of close, convincing argument — how much? The Greek orators carried their audience with them—an audience of men. Our Lacordaires and Didons carry away their churches full of women. But men—men with brains—how many? Bah!"

Mdme. Martineau. "Ah! Monsieur le Professeur, one must have a little religion in this world."

Mdme. de Belcour (*softly*). "For when one is old."

Elton (*to Genron*). "In our Church there is more latitude, more free play of thought. A dozen different doctrines in a dozen different churches—you choose the doctrine that suits you. All the world goes to hear a remarkable preacher, and he *does* carry away some men as well as women."

Genron (*smiling ironically*). "I spoke of men with brains, sir. Your Herbert Spencer, your Huxley, etc."

Eliza. (*in English, speaking low to Baring through Genron's speech, which flows on*). "I give you up that old atheist. Why will he insist that every one who has any faith is a fool? He is odious."

Baring (*with a faint smile*). "You are like the Russian traveller, obliged to fling out his children one by one to the wolves. Doucet and Narishkine are already devoured; now the old Voltairean is going. I am delighted."

Eliza. "Don't press the analogy too closely. Recollect it is to *you* I am flinging them." (*Here she also smiles.*)

Baring. "I think not. I can't flatter myself that you

would throw me even a bone. I am glad to think it is voluntary, this throwing overboard of carrion."

Eliza. "Voluntary? Of course it is voluntary. I don't adopt other people's ready-made prejudices, Mr. Baring. I have never heard the professor scoff openly at religion before, and I can't bear it."

Elton (*in French, continuing his discussion with the professor*). "Quite a mistake, monsieur. In England, some of the greatest thinkers of every age have struggled for faith. Some have been men of real piety. Infidelity—rank, downright infidelity—a good deal played out. 'Very cheap,' as we say." (*Trans.* "*Bon Marché*" *somewhat puzzled his hearers.*)

Mdme. de Belcour (*leaning across*). "Cher docteur!"

Morin. "Madame?"

Mdme. de B. "Pray change the conversation! I feel as if it were Lent—as if I ought to fast—and I want to eat this fricandeau. Let us all agree to be religious by-and-by, and amuse ourselves now."

Morin (*laughing*). "Like Saint Augustine, who prayed to be made good—'but not to-day, O Lord!'"

Doucet (*demoniacally*). "What is 'good' and 'bad'? Who knows? To sin as Nature, the great mother, dictates, and then to bow down to the dust, and pray forgiveness with streaming eyes, and then to sin again—what is the good? what is the bad? To the poet, the two extremes are equally moving, and he knows not under which phase his soul——"

Morin. "Ah! talk about his body, mon petit Doucet. Leave his soul alone. You have studied that less than the other."

Doucet. "Not at all! The poet, who is inspired——"

But the poet's organ-pipe is here overpowered by the professor's sharp-pitched treble; and though Doucet retains an audience at the lower end of the table, the conversation is carried on at the upper end, independent of him.

Genron (*to Elton*). "Have you young decadent poets in England, monsieur?"

Elton. "A few, I am told. Not very poetical myself. No poetry like Pope, I think—so quotable. Don't you think so, Miss Shaw?"

Eliza. (*smiling*). "Is not that rather like saying, 'There is no painter like Hogarth'?"

Elton. "Well, to me there is none. Faithful mirror of his age. Sense, satire, moral sequence, cause and effect—what do you want more in a picture?"

Baring. "I want less, and I want more."

Elton. "Hm! I like truth. Suppose I have no imagination."

Genron. "The strong point of your nation. We have too much, and so we come to grief. Phlegm is the Englishman's force, and it is a great force in the conduct of human affairs."

Mdme. Martineau (*fearing the cynical professor's speech is rude, throws herself into the breach*). "But what a wise nation! So noble! No revolutions, like us! Ah, what a blessing!"

Elton. "Madame has known many English?"

Mdme. M. "No, monsieur, not many. I should have visited England once, but events——" (*Here she throws up her expressive eyes.*)

Morin. "We must be grateful to those events, madame. Had you gone, you would have stayed, and we should have been the losers. Mademoiselle comes here" (*turning to Elizabeth with a smile*), "and she likes us so much she means to remain."

Elton (*with a sharp little laugh like a bark*). "England may have a word to say to that, monsieur! We cannot allow you to carry off all our prizes, as well as to retain your own."

Elizabeth sent one sharp glance at him across the table, and began folding up her napkin. The dinner was, indeed, over; the lamp was lit in the salon. Madame rose, and they all filed out. Once there, Elton cornered the object of his pursuit, and held her in conversation until she broke away, at the end of half an hour.

On these lines, and to this extent, more or less, was their intercourse twice every day during the next week. Do what he would, Lord Robert could obtain no more. He was exasperated. George, on the other hand, played what I believe is called a "waiting game." He was satisfied that there was no danger to be apprehended from the enterprising young politician. If he had only time given him—time, without the introduction of any disturbing element—he was sanguine of success. But, unfortunately, time was just what he was not sure of. The accounts he received of his uncle were very much the same. He was no worse, but he was no better. If there was no improvement at the end of the week, Mr. Twisden would telegraph for his nephew.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHAT do you think of this new Englishman?" asked Hatty of her brother, a day or two after his arrival. She was still confined to her room.

"Oh! he is better than the other. I would rather trust him of the two, though he has a bad manner—like most Englishmen. But he is clever, I suppose."

"Does she seem to like him?"

"*She?* Do you mean Miss Shaw? I am sure I don't know. Either he or that fellow George are always buzzing about her. I should say that, of the two, she preferred George."

"She certainly was annoyed at Mr. Elton's coming here."

"She told you so?"

"Have you heard if Mr. George is really going away?"

"No. It does not much signify. If it is not he, it will be another—dancing attendance on her."

"She sees nothing of Monsieur Doucet, I am sure, now?"

"Naturally. But, as I told her the other day, she will throw one after the other to the wolves—these Englishmen with the rest, in time."

"You are very unjust to my friend, Ally. You want to make out that she is a flirt. She is nothing of the kind. She is ignorant of the world, and chooses, theoretically, to believe, or to fancy she believes, that all men are alike—bad. But, as she has to associate with them, she gets as much amusement out of their society as she can."

"She certainly contrives to get a good deal, in one way or another. But don't let us begin the old story over again, Hatty. Miss Shaw and I have nothing in common. I did something for her once; it was not much—still it was something. According to you, she is well able to take care of herself. I do not trouble myself more about her. I certainly am not going to join the crowd of her admirers."

"I think your tone is very unchivalrous," returned his sister, severely. "You make no allowance for the girl's youth. She behaved foolishly about that horrid Monsieur Doucet, I admit. But what did it amount to? Ignorance of Frenchmen's ideas and conduct towards women. As soon as she saw her mistake——"

"She did not see it for a very long time."

"Possibly. But as soon as she did see it, she exposed him courageously—more as one of our own countrywomen would have done than most English girls, I fancy; and has probably incurred his lasting enmity in consequence."

He was silent for a moment.

"The subject is of no importance—to *me*. But may I ask you to say truthfully whether she did or did not encourage this fellow George in a curious way for a girl

who believes all men are reprobates—passing the days almost entirely alone with him at Fontainebleau?"

"If she passed the days alone with him, whose fault was that?" cried Hatty, flaring up in her friend's defence. "You were huffed because she had more sympathy with his way of painting than with yours (of course she is all wrong, but *that* has nothing to do with it); and so you stalked off by yourself, and of course I followed you."

"She showed very plainly she didn't want me, either then or later."

"I am not surprised. You made yourself very disagreeable. You, who have a finer intelligence, and could make yourself so much more charming than any one here if you choose—you provoke me, Ally! If Miss Shaw avoids you, if she dislikes you, as you choose to imagine, all I can say is—I am not surprised."

Her excitement had brought a red spot into her cheek, and she lay back on the sofa, coughing.

Though he tried to appear unconcerned, there was a certain irritation in his tone as he replied, "Why worry yourself about your friend and me? We don't suit. I am not made, as you know, for this sort of life—bandying empty nothings with these French people. I suppose I *am* disagreeable—I can't pretend. And this girl, who begins by being an icicle, and ends by thawing before every man who—who chooses to make up to her—frankly, she makes me angry. She is a fine creature, I admit, and I am glad that you and she should be friends. But intimacy between two women is different from intimacy between man and woman. Just because this one has

a charm which has won you, I think her dangerous—to a man. She seems to me to go about seeking whom she may devour. I don't mean to be devoured."

"Has she made the smallest sign of wishing to devour you?" asked his sister, sarcastically, raising her head. "No! Your own words convict you. You say she showed very plainly she did not want you—that she does not like you——"

"Only because I do not pay her the attention she expects, and is used to receive."

"You argue in a vicious circle. You are cold and stiff in your manner to her; and when she returns your lead, as any girl of spirit would, you say she does not like you; but she is dangerous, and you are not going to be devoured. You take yourself too seriously, Alaric—you really do."

"I am sorry you think so, Hatty," he said gravely; "for you are the one person in the world who loves me, and whose opinion I care for. If you think me a vain fool——"

"No, no, no!" she cried remorsefully, and seized his hand in both hers. "I never meant that. There is no one in the world like you, Ally—no one so good and high-minded and unselfish. Only you don't make allowance for poor weak human nature, including yourself."

"I don't know what you are driving at, Hatty. If I am not a fool—and I do not think I am, though very far from being the Phœnix you imagine me—but if I am not a fool, why am I to 'make allowances' for myself? Why do you say I take myself too seriously?"

"You are over-sensitive, as so many of our countrymen

are; and too critical of yourself, as well as of others. You very seldom let yourself go. Your reticence is positively a disease, in a mixed company. With Miss Shaw you never seem perfectly at your ease."

"I am not."

"There! You own it. And why, pray?"

"She expects more attention from men than I choose to give, and therefore she receives whatever I say with a certain antagonism. I feel it—I *know* it. If I criticize her work, she thanks me; but she at once goes and follows George's advice rather than mine."

Hatty made a queer little grimace. "Jealous, eh? That is promising!"

"Jealous! Not the least. This young Englishman—his views of art, his glibness, his spirits—it all suits her better than I ever could. I do not enter into the competition, you see. Neither you nor I care for this Mr. George; but that does not affect the question."

"Are you quite sure? Well, no one can open her eyes as to your superiority over every other man here but yourself." Here she lay back with a look of exhaustion; then added, a moment later, "I cannot bear that my brother and the only woman-friend I have should stand thus aloof. Good night, Ally. I am so tired; I must crawl into bed now. God bless you!"

He left her with a sore heart. Not that he realized how ill she was. She was always delicate, always catching cold; he had given up being alarmed as to her condition. But her words had stirred him. His position, he told himself, was a strong one; but, defend it as he might, Hatty's attack had destroyed some of its

bulwarks. She had said his conduct was not "chivalrous" towards a young girl. That word started a new train of self-examination. He knew that on one occasion he had acted chivalrously on her behalf, where many men would have hesitated to interfere in what did not concern them. But had his thoughts about her always been those that the strong protector should have for the young and weak? She loved admiration, and she was stubborn. She paid no attention to what he said, and was even saucy at times. But then, upon the other hand, she was very young, and ignorant—her cleverness notwithstanding. Was Hatty right; and had he shown no chivalry in his intolerance of her aggravating ways, in his assumption that she tried to "devour" every man she came near? That was not chivalrous, he owned. It was a declaration begotten of jealousy. Yes, Hatty was right. He recognized now, though he would not admit to his sister, that a strong personal feeling coloured all his thoughts about this English girl.

He slept very little that night, and found in the morning—the first cold one of the autumn—that Hatty was no better. Her cough had kept her awake, she said, and she felt unequal to the exertion of dressing. Alaric went off to the studio, and soon afterwards Elizabeth paid her a visit. She did not stay long with her friend, for she saw that talking made Hatty cough; but, on ascending the stair to her atelier, she stopped before Baring's door.

It was not premeditated. A sudden impulse made her knock. He opened the door, and his surprise at seeing her was manifest.

"Mr. Baring," she began at once, as she stepped over the threshold, "I think Hatty ought to see a doctor. She is very weak and feverish, and her cough is certainly worse."

"She has been so often like this—in fact, nearly all last winter she was a prisoner. I am afraid you will not persuade her to see a doctor."

"May I send for one on my own account, and take all the responsibility?"

"No; I could not allow that." A flush rose to his face as he spoke. "If you consider it necessary, I will send for one; but I am afraid she will be annoyed. She can't bear doctors."

"Never mind that. You can put all the blame on me. I am sure she ought to have advice."

"She shall have it." He questioned her truthful eyes. "She only complained to me of feeling tired. What did she say to you?"

"It is not what she said; it is her look, her feverish hands, and that constant cough. You know of a good doctor?"

"Yes; there is a good American here, in whom I have every confidence. I will go to him at once. Thank you for coming, Miss Shaw. I am afraid you think me very churlish. My sister says I am; but I appreciate your kindness in coming to me all the more, as it must have been disagreeable to you."

"I did not think whether it was agreeable or disagreeable," she replied, with something like irritability; while Baring instantly wished he could recall his foolish speech. (Hatty would have twitted him with it, and justly.)

Elizabeth continued, as she moved towards the door, "I felt you ought to know that your sister is really ill. Men are slower to recognize the gravity of illness than women. That is all." And she passed out quickly, shutting the door behind her, before he could find another word to say.

Elizabeth was at her friend's bedside that afternoon when the doctor came. Miss Baring received him with less reluctance than Elizabeth expected. She left the room presently, but lay in wait on the stairs for him as he passed out.

"Mr. Baring is not in the house," she said, "but would like to hear your opinion of his sister's case more frankly, perhaps, than you would give it to her herself, and I have promised to report it to him."

"She requires very great care—and warmth. She should not pass the winter in Paris. I have told her so."

Elizabeth's countenance fell.

"But what is she to do? Her brother can't leave his work. Perhaps in a warmer apartment——?"

"I will see her again in a day or two. If my present view of her case is confirmed, no change of apartment would be of any avail. The air of Paris is too keen for any one in her state."

He bowed, and passed down the stairs. Elizabeth turned into the sick-room.

Miss Baring's head was buried in the pillow; she was sobbing. Emotion had always seemed so foreign to the American woman's nature, that Elizabeth was frightened.

"What is the matter, dear Hatty?" she asked quickly,

bending over the bed, and laying her hand gently on her shoulder.

"He says I ought to go to the South! And I can't—I can't—I won't leave him. If I am as ill as that, I had better die here. He—he has made so many sacrifices for me already. Think of the expense! And to be parted from him, and all alone! No! I won't leave him. He is all I have in the world—I won't leave him!"

"You are exciting yourself needlessly, dear," said Elizabeth after an interval, which was filled by Hatty's racking cough. "The doctor will not pronounce decidedly till he sees you again. When he does so, it will be time enough to talk of what we will or will not do."

"*We?*" The girl turned her white tear-stained face, and fixed her prominent short-sighted eyes on her friend.

"Yes—we. If you had to go away for a time, I should accompany you. I would not let you go alone."

"What! and throw up your classes, and everything? Oh, Lizzie! I couldn't let you do that."

"We won't talk about it, then, till the time comes. Perhaps it never may come. Now I am going out to get the prescription he left made up for you."

When she quitted the apothecary's half an hour later, she walked on the quay, going towards the Champs de Mars. In her black dress, with a thick veil, she was not likely to attract attention, and she wanted to be alone; she had no heart to return to Monsieur D——'s class that day. It was astonishing how attached she had grown to this American girl in the short space of three months. Nothing but this would have made her decide, on the spur

of the moment, that she would not let Hatty leave Paris alone. She had suddenly awoke to the consciousness that afternoon that the girl was seriously ill—far more ill than her brother imagined, or than Elizabeth herself had conjectured, when begging him to send for a doctor. It would be a sacrifice to leave her work; she did not deny it. But she was not a girl to shrink from a sacrifice where her affections were concerned. Alaric Baring would certainly be unable to accompany his sister. His daily bread depended on his following his profession, and what could he do at some dead-alive health resort? If there ever was a moment to prove that her friendship was not one of mere words, it was now.

She had reached this stage in her reflections, when one of the yellow, white-hatted *fiacres*, which are always supplied with hot-water tins for the feet, passed her. She did not see a face thrust out of the window, but was conscious that the *fiacre* pulled up immediately, and that some one jumped out. The next minute she heard Lord Robert's voice at her elbow.

"Just come from the Embassy, Miss Shaw. Heard a piece of news there may interest you. You don't mind my walking with you, I hope?"

"No. I am going home. What is your news?"

"Colonel Wybrowe is going to be married to the great American heiress, Miss Krupp. Five million dollars!"

"It doesn't interest me in the least, Lord Robert."

"You used to be a great friend of his."

"No; I never was that."

"Not when he sat to you, morning after morning, and you were angry because I wouldn't admire him?"

With a smiling impertinence not lost on him, she replied, "Nothing you could—or better, nothing you *would*—say could make me angry, I am sure. I am not especially interested in all the models that sit to me, whether handsome or not—least of all in Colonel Wybrowe."

"That is a consolation to a man who could never be your model. Ugliness has its advantages."

"Has it?" she inquired, with a wicked air of innocence. "What are they?"

"If one has any success"—he waited to adjust the clasp of his sentence, then snapped it with—"one knows it is not due to one's exterior."

'It must be delightful to be beautiful," she said irrelevantly, as she walked vigorously along, inhaling the sharp October air. "I sometimes think I would rather be beautiful than anything."

"May I say—that is foolish? I care so little for regular rule-and-measure beauty; I remember saying so to you once before."

"I was not thinking of you, Lord Robert. Beauty is an attraction about which there can be no mistake. There are so many mistakes about other attractions."

"Such as what? Don't understand you."

"Oh, such as cleverness, or good temper, or—or—or money. All these things—I mean the belief in them—may deceive a man: beauty can't. There it is, undeniable."

"But not necessarily attractive."

"No, not necessarily. But if I were beautiful, and—had nothing else to recommend me, I should know, at least, that the man who made up to me was genuinely in love."

He was struck back for a moment, but recovered himself quickly.

"And you would really value that sort of love? Sort of thing that dies out in the honeymoon—and then, where are you? You're awfully young, Miss Shaw, and know nothing of life—nothing! Look at a man's character—that's the main thing. If it stands high, and he has got brains, and—and—that you like him, you've a better chance of happiness with him, believe me, than with your love-at-first-sighter!"

"Perhaps." There was a mischievous twinkle in her eye, only he could not see it through her veil, as she went on. "I am thinking of founding a college for women-artists, and endowing it. It will take the greater part of my fortune; but I shall live there myself, which I shall love, and paint all day—which will be much nicer than leading a stupid life in the world."

"If you take such a mad step, you will regret it, all your days," he fired off sharply.

"I don't think so. I know so very well what I *don't* want. That is one step in advance towards being happy, isn't it?"

"Not always at your time of life. What is it you don't want?"

"A great position in London, constant society, country-houses; and, more than all, I should hate official life. All the talk about 'party,' all the political intriguery, would bore me dreadfully."

"You are unjust to yourself—unjust to public life. Low elements in it, I grant. But not entirely made up of them. There *is* such a thing as patriotism. If you

were married to a man with the welfare of his country at heart—a man strenuous to use his talents for the public good—you would not take such a contemptuous view of a political career. You might get to think that the life of an orator whose eloquence influences the destiny of a people, is not so very inferior in interest to that of a painter or a poet!"

He spoke with an irritability which rasped the ear. And Elizabeth, while she in no way repented of her plain speaking, hastened to apply such salve as she could to his wounded vanity.

"I do not take a contemptuous view of a political career; you mistake me. I know it is a very important and useful one, and I honour men who devote their energies to the public good. But, personally speaking, I should dislike to lead the sort of life that belonging to a public man would entail. I am quite unfitted for it, and have no social ambition."

"There is a social ambition that is vulgar, and another that is not," he replied, by no means soothed, for he saw the object of *his* ambition which he had pursued so obstinately growing more and more intangible. "The ambition to live surrounded by whatever is best worth knowing—you will have that some day, if you haven't it now. 'Position' affords facilities for this. It is one of the few advantages left to 'position' nowadays. But it is a definite one—one which I suspect you would find wanting among your women-artists. They'll talk nothing but 'shop.'"

"Oh, I hope not!" laughed Elizabeth, as they reached the door of the pension. "But, anyway, I had rather

have to listen to a 'shop' which I understand, than to a 'shop' which I don't!"

Lord Robert Elton uttered a quick ejaculation of impatience. Had he taken all this trouble to be defeated? It looked like it.

CHAPTER X.

ALARIC entered his sister's room a few mornings later. She was on the sofa, and alone. He asked how she felt, and then said—

"I have accidentally made a curious discovery just now." As he spoke he slowly paced the room with folded arms. "My opinion of your friend is rather strengthened by it."

She fixed her *pince-nez* on her nose, and looked at her brother anxiously. "Well?" is all she said.

"The man who followed her here a week ago is a lord. I was going up the stairs just after him, and picked up two envelopes that he had dropped. They were addressed to 'Lord Robert Elton, M.P., Carlton Club,' and had been forwarded from there to the Continental Hotel. If they had not been empty I should have taken them to his room. As it was, I thought it best not to annoy him by showing that I had learnt his real position."

"Certainly—quite right. But what has that to do with Elizabeth Shaw? Why do you say that——"

"That my opinion is strengthened about her? Because she knew who this Elton really is. She tells you she is annoyed at his following her here, but it is evident there

have been passages between them. You will see. She will marry this lord."

"I am told he talks very cleverly, and that must be attractive to her," said his sister, wickedly.

"Oh! of course—and the title, too!" he sneered.

"That is an insinuation quite unworthy of you. If Elizabeth marries this lord, it will be because she likes him better than any one else—for no other reason."

"She has a large circle to choose from!"

"I wish you would make it a little larger," murmured the sick woman. And then she turned round, and would not speak another word.

Just before luncheon the same day George received a telegram.

"Still a prisoner. Better come at once. Urgent business waiting.—TWISDEN."

The bell rang, and he went down to the dining-room. No one was there but Madame Martineau, who was warming her feet at the wood fire by lifting her black silk petticoat, and extending first one fat leg and then the other towards the flame. She smiled benignantly at him; he made himself so universally pleasant, and paid his weekly account so regularly.

"I am sorry to say, madame," he began, with a grave inclination of his head, "that I have to leave you this afternoon. I am called back suddenly to England."

"Ah! mon Dieu! What is that you tell me? Called back?"

"Yes, madame; there is no help for it. I have been here three weeks to-day. I hoped it would have been

six; but 'l'homme propose'—you know the rest. Still, I do not despair of being able to return in the winter. Will you be my friend, madame? Will you do me a favour?"

"Comment! But certainly! You so amiable young man! What is there I would not do for you?"

"It is simply this. Inform me if Miss Shaw leaves your pension; and if you can, let me know where she goes."

Madame's black eyes twinkled, as she wagged her head.

"Ah! quant à ça—she is fixed for the winter. She so great friends with Mademoiselle Baring, who never go away."

"Still, promise to let me know if she *does* leave you; but do not name my request to any one."

She gave the promise he asked, and received from him an address where, under his assumed name, any letter would reach him. And then the boarders, by ones and twos, came dropping in. Elizabeth was one of the last. She gave her customary little sweeping bow to the table, as she took her place beside Alaric Baring, and said—

"Hatty, I hope, is a little better this morning."

"I hope so; but she will not leave her room."

"Have you heard the sad news?" said madame, in her native tongue. "Monsieur George is leaving us to-day."

There was a universal chorus of "Quel dommage!" Elizabeth leant forward, and caught his eye, a little further down the table.

"So you have been recalled, as you feared, Mr. George?"

He nodded, and was about to speak, when Lord Robert, who had just entered, exclaimed—

"I also am afraid that I shall be recalled. Had letters this morning. You are right, Miss Shaw. A public man's life is slavery—positive slavery!"

"I never said so. But I have been told that slaves like the institution, and are never so happy after they are free."

"You are really departing, monsieur?" said the law-student from the end of the table. "And you have not yet heard the Senator Travieux speak?"

"It is a pity, is it not? Can't be helped, unless—something unforeseen happens."

"'Encore une étoile qui file,
Qui file, file, et disparait!'"

murmured Madame de Belcour, with her keepsake smile at him. But he did not see it; he never saw more than one thing at a time. A vain man in his own way—dogged, determined, but not accessible to open flatteries from women of this stamp.

There was not the same chorus of "Dommage!" on his account. The ugly Englishman had only been here one week, as against the fair fresh one's four, and though he had talked more than any one at table, and had kept alive the spirit of antagonism to "perfide Albion" briskly but not unpleasantly during that time, it cannot be said that he had fascinated any one.

"Monsieur Georges holds out hopes of returning to us: and you, monsieur?" asked Madame Martineau. "May we hope to see you again?"

"If I go, madame"—here he looked very directly at Elizabeth—"I do not return. I make it a rule in life never to go back."

The old professor, who had not yet spoken, but had caught his neighbour's glance across the table, and observed the girl's face flush, here observed, with his cynical smile—

"'Reculer pour mieux sauter' is not a bad proverb sometimes."

"Englishmen do not jump, monsieur. They walk straight to the target they mean to hit. If they miss it, they still walk straight on. They do not turn back. Useless."

Morin (*laughing*). "Pardon, monsieur. That sounds like a want of perseverance."

Elton. "No one has yet charged me with that. But a man with many calls on him must sometimes sacrifice inclination to duty. 'Duty' is the Englishman's word."

Doucet. "Duty? The greatest pleasure in life is to neglect one's duty."

The Professor. "Monsieur Doucet's life must be made up of pleasures."

Mdme. de Belcour. "He has embodied the sentiment in a charming sonnet."

Doucet. "Which those idiots the critics could not understand!"

Morin (*laughing*). "And yet it is a sentiment which appeals to us all, I am sure."

Eliza. (*quickly*). "Not to me."

George. "No; not to any of us English. I agree with —Mr. Elton. 'Duty' is the Englishman's word. It is

taking me back to England, and I hate going. But I should be more unhappy if I remained."

Mdme. Clinchaut. "But you will come back to Paris to paint—no?"

Mdme. Martineau. "Yes, yes; monsieur is coming back. They do not paint in England, I am told."

George. "Oh yes, madame, they do. Only their teaching, except at the Slade School——"

Eliza. (*half aside*). "Oh! that Slade School again!"

Elton. "Quite as good. No use coming here for *that*. I think you said you had never been in England, madame?"

Mdme. M. "Ah, no! I was near to going once. I had a friend who lived in le Cantorbury——"

Mdme. de B. (*under her breath*). "Près du 'Petit Saint Thomas.'"

The Professor (*sardonically*). "We have heard of him. The fact is, monsieur, we French are the worst travellers in the world. There is not one of us here, I believe, who has ever been out of France. (*Here a hubbub of voices begins again, out of which the only articulate words are, "Jamais de la vie!"*)

Morin (*shaking his head*). "As Madame Martineau says, it is that crossing. Were it not for that, I—I who speak to you would——"

Elton. "What! deterred by an hour and twenty minutes' sea? And there are Mr. Baring and his sister who tell me they have crossed the Atlantic sixteen times!"

Baring. "On business—not for pleasure; though my sister, I think, is never so well as at sea."

Mdme. M. (*looking bilious at the bare thought*). "American stomachs must be different. That is all."

Doucet. "Why should I go to a country where they do not read French—where they do not understand what I say? I was asked to go to London, to recite some ballads at concerts there. But I said, 'It would be desecrating my talent to speak my verses to people who do not understand.'"

The Professor. "It requires a special talent to do so. I have it not. You were wise, Monsieur Doucet, not to risk it."

Mdme. de B. "To be understood is to be vulgar. Any one can be understood. Is it not so, doctor?"

Morin (*moving his head from side to side*). "Ah! I say not quite that. Still there is a charm in the vague—in the difficult of comprehension—as I have remarked in my lecture on Dante."

Eliza. "You have lectured on Dante?"

Morin. "Yes—from a medical point of view—quite a new one."

Baring (*to Elizabeth, taking advantage of the babel of tongues, now grown louder*). "Do you hear these French men? Not one of them who does not contrive to shift the conversation back to himself. Their egoism is amazing!"

Eliza. (*to Baring*). "I don't mind it, as I did at first. It is so naïf. Perhaps we are just as self-absorbed, though we haven't the courage to show it."

Baring. "You are not wanting in courage." (*He is about to add something, but Elton, who has been firing right and left, stops him short with a shot.*)

Elton. "Mr. Baring, why not exhibit in London?

Good portrait-painters scarce. More orders to be had there than here. Fat aldermen, and fat aldermen's wives —orders without end for you."

Baring. "I shall never paint subjects that are uncongenial to me. Franz Hals could paint a fat burgher, and make a splendid thing of him. I could not. As to exhibiting—there is great jealousy of foreigners with you."

Elton. Quite a mistake. Sargent—Alma Tadema—Boehm—great favourites. All nonsense. And if you want beauty—we have the most beautiful women in the world. Isn't it so, Miss Shaw?"

Eliza. "I don't know; I suppose so. But I have never seen any of the famous beauties—only their photographs; and I remember once" (*with a smile*) "a lady I admired you would not admit was beautiful."

Elton. "Oh! Miss Palliser? A painted doll—no. Don't admire artifice—give me nature."

Mdme. de B "Englishmen call corsets 'artifice,' I believe. We call the arrangement of the fat—the placing of the figure—*art*. As long as we wear clothes, it is useless to talk about 'nature.'"

Elton. "Quite useless to *talk* about it, madame. I agree with you."

But here the contention of sharp-pitched voices which arose rendered it difficult to separate any individual utterance from the tangled skein. Mesdames Martineau and Clinchaut were understood to support Madame de Belcour, who boldly announced that all the resources of art which made a woman look better were legitimate. Anatole Doucet, in his most dramatic manner, boomed

out that whatever was unnatural had a strange fascination for him: it was subtle, mysterious, unexpected. The professor's little shrill flageolet was heard to say that, whatever else it might be, in some cases it was not *unexpected.* Elizabeth could not refrain from a protest, which no one heard but Baring, in favour of an untinted skin; and Morin felt bound to remind the audience that he, as a doctor, had written a valuable *brochure* on the subject. The men at the further end of the table swelled the turmoil, which lasted without cessation until Madame Martineau rose.

George at once came up to Elizabeth, as Alaric Baring left the room.

"I shall not see you again, Miss Shaw. I leave by the club train. Will you not give me some little commission, which may serve as an excuse for my writing to you?"

She shook her head. "I have no commissions in England. I am trying to forget it, and everything in it, except two old men."

"The poor young one will be there in a few hours, who does not wish to be forgotten."

She smiled. "You do not belong to England—to *my* England, I mean. You belong to my Paris; and though our acquaintance has been so short, I shall not forget you." Then, in her odd, sudden way, she added, looking him straight in the face, "I think you are honest, Mr. George."

He coloured to the roots of his hair; it was a very inconvenient trick nature played him at times.

"Tell me I may come back here in the winter?" he said in a low voice.

"How can I prevent you? Wherever we may meet again, I shall be glad to see you. I can say no more than that."

"But you will remain here?"

"I hope to remain—but cannot be sure, yet."

He waited a moment; then he said, "You believe in 'duty.' I heard you say so. Have you no duties to take you back to England?"

"None, at present. 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.'"

"Perhaps it need not be 'evil,' if you allowed another—a man you believe to be 'honest,'—to share the burthen of those duties, whatever they may be."

She started; not visibly, but mentally. A disagreeable suggestion obtruded itself; she tried to chase it away, as she replied hurriedly—

"My duties are not pressing for consideration yet; and, however irksome, I hope to be able to cope with them, unassisted, later. I must now go to my sick friend. Good-bye."

She held out her hand. He tried to hold it an instant in his, but she withdrew it quickly. And yet he did not feel entirely baffled, as she left the apartment with a light step. On the contrary, he had made as much way, perhaps, as could reasonably be expected in the course of four weeks.

The doctor did not see Miss Baring that day. His medicines had relieved her cough, but she was very weak. She got up, and lay in her shabby grey dressing-gown on the sofa, blinking with her short-sighted eyes at the wall opposite, while Elizabeth piled wood on the fire with

a recklessness which made her poor and careful friend wince, before Elizabeth sat down to read aloud to her the last number of the *Revue des deux Mondes.*

Alaric was at his work; the two girls were alone together till late in the afternoon, when Elizabeth felt a longing for some fresh air, and, putting on her hat and seal-skin jacket, went for a quick walk in the Luxembourg Garden. It was nearly dusk; but she was seen to leave the house by one who had decided that he must seize the first opportunity of speaking to the heiress again, definitely and definitively. It might, indeed, be a little premature to expect a positive acceptance of his hand; he did not wish to precipitate matters; still, if she maintained the same tone she had done yesterday, Robert Elton felt it would be useless to waste any more time here.

He followed and overtook her, as she was entering the garden.

"Going for a 'constitutional,' Miss Shaw?" he cried. "Let me join you. May not have another opportunity. If I am recalled, as I fear——"

"What it is to be a political man!" said Elizabeth, gaily. "How I do hug my independence!"

"Don't mean that seriously—eh? Don't mean that you will always hug it?"

"It will require a strong temptation to induce me to resign it."

"What sort of temptation?"

"Love. I know no other."

"Had no idea you were so sentimental."

"I am *sensi*-mental—common-sensimental. That is

all. What should I resign my independence for, if not for love? For rank? For ambition? Poor little common sense tells me it isn't worth it."

"And common sense will be bowled over the first time you meet a man who attracts you—however worthless! It is always so—always!" he snapped out.

She looked very grave; she could not speak for a moment. Then she said slowly—

"I am not infallible. I have made mistakes. I may make them again. But it will not be with my eyes open."

"And you would think it 'a mistake,'" he replied, with more than his usual vehemence, "to marry a man who is attached to you, because—though he may have brains—he has none of the insinuating charm that wins women; because, in short, he has nothing but his heart and an honourable name to offer you?"

"It would be a mistake to marry if I did not love him—or at least *think* that I loved him. And there is something more than this. Shall I make a confession to you? If I ever marry, I believe it will be some one who does not know that I have any money."

He looked shocked. What a very odd girl this was! How could one answer such a speech as that? But it was final. If these were Miss Shaw's real sentiments, there was nothing further to be said or done. The awkward pause that followed was broken by Elizabeth's saying—

"You have kept my counsel, since you have been here, Lord Robert?"

"Most faithfully."

"Have you known Mr. George long?"

"For some years. Middle class, but not a bad young fellow."

"You have never spoken to him about me?"

"No; he mentioned you once to me. I answered him—nothing more."

"Does he know that I have money, Lord Robert?" She turned her head, so that she might watch his face.

"You don't mean that *he*——? Confound his impudence! The young jackanapes!"

"I asked you a plain question. You have not answered it."

"My answer is that he certainly does. I can say no more—am bound by a promise. But it is no breach of faith to tell you so much. He does know you have money."

"Thank you. Another reed broken by the wind." She smiled rather bitterly. "Don't imagine that I am in love—that you have dispelled an illusion. But I liked the young man, and I believed in him. I am sorry."

"And so you absolutely refuse to believe in any one who knows you have money? How absurd! Can't conceal it all your life. Ends in your believing no one. Cheerful existence, Miss Shaw!"

"You think I am too young to be so cynical? I don't want to be so. But circumstances have been against me."

"Circumstances? What circumstances?"

"Oh, never mind. I might say a combination of many. If you wish me to be frank, Lord Robert, you are one of them."

"I? What do you mean? I have helped to make you cynical?"

She hesitated a moment. "Well, it is like this, you see. The duke and duchess ignored my uncle and aunt until I came to live at Farley. They then began to overwhelm us with civilities, and your arrival there was announced to me as that of a clever, ambitious man, in search of an heiress. Do you wonder at my feeling nettled? I got over that feeling. I liked your society well enough, but—but it opened my eyes; that is, it *ought* to have opened my eyes to my own worth. The real opening came a little later."

"You hold yourself too cheap," he returned sharply. "If I were a rich man, and you hadn't a penny, I would marry you; because the more I see of you, the more I like you—a great deal better than any woman I ever met. If I didn't feel like that, I wouldn't have followed you here. Was I a fool to do so?"

"Knowing now how I feel, you will see it was useless."

"How could I tell you were so unreasonable on this subject? It is true, if you were poor I couldn't marry you, but the money is the least of your attractions to me now. That's the plain truth, Miss Shaw. You shake your head. Well, if you don't believe me—useless to stay. Only boring you, and can do no good. Hoped in time you might get to like me well enough to—well, to overlook my ugliness. I know that is it. If you had heard me speak in the House, it might have been different. Pitt was uglier than I am. But you never heard me speak. And you were prejudiced against me before you saw me. It can't be helped. I am bitterly disappointed—

bitterly, Miss Shaw. But I shall try and hide my wound, and return to my work."

They walked on, their feet rustling among the fallen leaves, for some time longer. Elizabeth felt that the worst was over, and she did not mind hearing him to an end, this perfectly straightforward gentleman, who certainly did not "protest too much." In the light of a lover he was intolerable; in the light of a man of the world, who, if he became a friend, would be a sincere one, she felt drawn to him. It was the last half-hour they were alone together before he left for England.

Late that night Hatty said to her brother, "*Both* the Englishmen are gone. See how unjust you were!"

"It matters nothing to me whether they go or stay."

"Then why insinuate such disagreeable things about my friend?"

He was silent.

CHAPTER XI.

THE following day—it was the last of October—was one of almost wintry cold. The doctor who visited Miss Baring had a long interview afterwards with her brother, at his studio. He did not mince matters; he put the case plainly before Alaric, who for the first time awoke to a sense of his sister's danger. Both her lungs were affected; there was but one chance of saving her—she must leave Paris immediately. The young man did not hesitate for a moment. Wherever she was ordered he would accompany her. The doctor spoke of Colorado; but the expense of the journey, and the conditions of life there, so disadvantageous for an artist (and how could they live, unless Alaric sold his pictures?), precluded that idea. The relative merits of St. Moritz and Madeira were then discussed. Finally, it was decided that a sheltered spot on the Riviera would meet all the exigencies of the case, and Mentone seemed to combine more than any other. It was warm, it was beautiful, it was an easy journey. Alaric could run up to Paris at no great cost, if necessary. The neighbourhood of Nice and Monte Carlo rendered both sitters and purchasers more probable than at more

remote health-resorts. For him, it was clearly the best place that had been suggested.

As the door closed on the doctor, Alaric walked to the shelf on which stood his shabby despatch-box, and unlocked it. He took out his bankers' book, and sat down to reflect as to ways and means. The result of his calculations was not very satisfactory. If he did not sell the picture on his easel, which was all but finished, and which he called "A Venetian Senator," he would not have more than sufficient to take them to Mentone, and keep them there for two or three months. He hated going to a dealer and offering his work for sale; but he remembered that the well-known Mr. Jacob had once come to him, and bought a picture: perhaps, if Alaric wrote to him, this man would pay him another visit. He swallowed his pride, sat down at once, wrote and directed the letter, and, holding it in his hand, went to his sister's room at the pension.

He found the two girls together. He had not seen Elizabeth before that morning, and, after shaking hands, took the vacant chair just opposite to her, beside Hatty's sofa.

"Did you see the doctor?" she inquired querulously. "Have you heard?"

"Yes. We must leave this in ten days, or a fortnight at latest."

"But how can you leave your work, Alaric? How can you afford such an expense? It is impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible," he said, with a reassuring smile. "I hope to sell my picture before I leave Paris. And I also hope to find sitters at Mentone."

"Mentone!" echoed Elizabeth. "That is a fashionable winter quarter, isn't it? Couldn't you find some quieter place?"

"I can't afford to be too quiet. I must think of sitters. I must be within reach of the multitude. Besides, there are splendid studies there, I am told. I shall paint some pot-boilers. Have you a postage-stamp, Hatty?"

"*I* have one," said Elizabeth, quickly, taking a small book from her pocket. "Give me your letter, and I will put it on."

She stretched out her hand, and, taking the letter he handed to her, said, as she affixed the stamp—

"You will not mind my accompanying Hatty, Mr. Baring? I am very independent, and shall not be in your way, I promise you."

He looked embarrassed. "Is not this too great a sacrifice to friendship, Miss Shaw? You came here to study painting. My sister has no claim on you, and——"

"Oh, do not talk about 'claims.' It sounds so legal. I *want* to go with Hatty; and as you say there are splendid studies at Mentone, I shan't be wasting my time."

She handed the letter back to him, while Miss Baring cried, in a tremulous voice—

"Oh, my dear! are you sure?"

The fact is, her sensitive New-England conscience demanded anxiously whether she was justified in accepting this proof of friendship. Longing with all her heart, as she did, that Elizabeth should accompany them, it is possible that she would have refused with stern self-

denial to entertain the idea, but for one consideration—Alaric was coming. Alaric would learn to know her friend better, and his prejudices would drop from him.

"You know, dear," she continued, looking up into the English girl's face, "there is nothing would give me such pleasure as to have you with me; but is it right? You have come here to study. The classes have just begun. Won't you repent of your decision if you leave Paris just now? You know you are only coming out of kindness to me."

"I am going because I like it. I have long wanted to see the Riviera. If I am bored, I can come back. On the other hand, if Mr. Baring is called to Paris on business, you will not mind being left alone with me."

"The journey is expensive," observed Baring, without looking at her.

"So I suppose."

"And living at Mentone, I am afraid, will be dear."

"No doubt. But who knows? Perhaps *I* may sell a pot-boiler there also, and turn an honest penny. At all events, I mean to risk it. And now I shall leave you together to talk over your plans."

As the door closed behind her, Alaric said to his sister, "Is it right to accept this sacrifice at Miss Shaw's hands?"

"She says, you see, it is no sacrifice; and I do want her to come so badly, Ally."

"She seems pretty reckless about money."

"I fancy she has a small independence. It may not be much; but I am sure she is not *reckless*."

A few minutes later, Elizabeth, thickly veiled, left the

house, and, crossing the Seine, made her way to the shop of a well-known picture-dealer in the Rue Lafitte.

"I wish to see Mr. Jacob," she said to the smart young man with waxed moustaches, who received her.

"He is engaged, mademoiselle."

"Then I will wait till he is free. I am come on a matter of business."

He went into an inner room, and, after a minute or two, returned, and begged the young lady to enter. She found the dealer seated at a table covered with letters, two empty cups which had contained coffee, a bottle of cognac, and some cigars. Opposite him sat a young man of Jewish aspect, with wonderful eyes and a splendid raven beard, but inclining already to baldness on the top of his head. He looked as if he wore stays, and Elizabeth, in the rapid glance she gave him, was conscious of a certain gorgeousness of appearance, attributable possibly to his surprisingly good figure and a scarlet tie. Both the men were smoking very large cigars, and both rose as Elizabeth entered. Her height, her rather commanding air, and her fine, clear, brunette complexion, which the walk had rendered more than usually brilliant, impressed both these connoisseurs in beauty, but in a different way, as she threw back her double veil. The dealer was impressed and puzzled. What could this young woman, so unlike those who came to him daily "on business," want? Was she a *grande dame*, come secretly to dispose of some of her ancestors? The younger man had no such questions to trouble him. He saw a woman, exactly of the type he most admired—a finely grown creature, with a proud carriage and eyes

like an eagle. She interested him at once. He was rich, he was generous; he was used to gratify every fancy he conceived. He was glad that his *tête-à-tête* with the old dealer had been interrupted. But his satisfaction was short-lived. The dealer was the first to speak.

"What can I do for you, madame?"

"I wish to see you alone, monsieur." She did not look at the Israelitish friend as she spoke, but was conscious that his eyes were riveted upon her.

"In that case, Monsieur Melchior, will you excuse me if I leave you and take this lady into another——"

"On no account. It is I who will go into the shop, and wait till your business is finished," interrupted the man he had called Melchior; then added, laughing and showing a row of brilliantly white teeth, "I am, as you know, the slave of the fair sex."

And with a profound bow, which she barely acknowledged, he went into the outer shop. She began at once—

"You know Mr. Baring, the American artist, I think?"

"Certainly. A very clever young man."

"I believe you will receive a letter from him this evening, asking you to go and see a picture he is finishing. I wish you to buy that picture for me."

He looked surprised. "But—I do not quite understand——"

"Why I do not buy it from him direct, and save your commission? I have my own reasons for not wishing Mr. Baring to know that I am the purchaser. And, before we go further, you must promise me not to reveal the fact to him."

"Certainly. But—the price? What are you prepared to give?"

"Whatever he asks, *plus* your commission. I shall not, however, be able to pay the whole sum down. I propose to do so by instalments. I could give you a thousand francs as soon as the picture is in your hands, and another thousand at Christmas; and I shall leave the picture in your hands until the whole amount is paid. Does that suit you, Mr. Jacob?"

"What reference can you give me?"

She named her banker.

"He will tell you I have a tolerable balance in his hands; and he will give you my address, if you wish to write to me when I leave Paris, which will probably be in less than a fortnight. In the mean time, this is my name and present address," and she laid her card on the table. "I shall be absent some months. It will therefore be a convenience to me, as well as a security to you, if you will keep the picture until such time as I can claim it."

The dealer promised to do so. It was, indeed, seldom that he had business of so simple a character to transact. He said he would visit Mr. Baring's atelier to-morrow, whether he received his letter or not; and communicate with mademoiselle as soon as the purchase was effected.

Elizabeth bowed her head, and turned to the door, which the dealer held open for her. As she passed through the outer shop, Monsieur Melchior was leaning against an easel, with the big cigar which he had just taken from his red lips held between his middle and fore fingers, in an easy attitude, displaying his slim

figure, broad shoulders, and narrow hips to the best advantage. Elizabeth's eye took it all in at a glance. She was conscious that he said something—she did not hear what; that he bowed—but she kept her eyes now fixed on the door, towards which she walked quickly. The dealer was behind her; the man with the waxed moustache at the further end of the shop. She tried to open the door, did not understand the trick of the handle, and in a moment found another hand, with a murmured, "Pardon; permettez moi, mademoiselle," pressing hers, as it turned the brass knob the contrary way. She snatched away her hand, and as she drew back found Monsieur Melchior's black beard and smiling red lips very close to her. Her indignant eyes flashed upon him for a moment; the next she had passed into the street.

"Quelle Diane Châsseresse! Who is she, Jacob? English by her accent; but where does she come from?"

The dealer took the card from the table, and handed it to Monsieur Melchior.

"Shaw? Shaw? Ça veut dire 'Bah!' en anglais. Living in a pension? Tiens! What is her business with you, Jacob?"

"She wants me to buy a picture for her."

"Whose? Suppose I buy it and give it her—eh?"

He laughed as he spoke. Seen thus, it was a passionate, sensual face, but not malevolent. The dealer shook his head.

"She is not that sort, I fancy, Monsieur Melchior. She is honest and straightforward, and, as you can see, not easy of access. There is some mystery about this affair.

She does not wish the painter to know that she is the purchaser."

"Who is the painter?"

The dealer paused a moment. "I don't know that I ought to tell you."

"Oh, come, Jacob. You know, if I take the trouble, I can easily find out."

"That is true. You will probably see the picture standing here for some months, as she wishes me to keep it for her. Baring, the American, is the painter. You remember his picture in the Salon last year?"

"Of course I do, and I know the man a little—a tall fellow, not bad-looking, with a red beard. So she does not want him to know that she buys his picture, and is content to pay you your 'pourboire,' to keep it a secret?" Here he laughed again. "Curious—very curious! What can be her reason? And how comes it that a girl living in a pension can afford to buy pictures at all?"

The dealer shrugged his shoulders. "The English are all very queer. No accounting for what they do."

"True; but this passes ordinary eccentricity. I have a mind to go to the pension and find out more about her."

"I hope you will not, for at least a fortnight, Monsieur Melchior. You will probably spoil the whole transaction if you do. I should not have told you. If you betray me, it will be a breach of confidence. The young lady will recognize you—will guess that I have told you. The whole business may be ruined. You have been a good patron of mine, Monsieur Melchior, and——"

"Well, well, say no more about it, Jacob. Until the

affair is concluded, I promise you to take no steps towards ferreting out all about this young woman."

* * * * * *

Thus it fell out that Alaric Baring sold his picture for what he asked, five thousand francs, the following day; and that Madame Martineau learnt she was to lose not only the brother and sister who had lodged with her so long, but also the best-paying of her *pensionnaires* —the girl who had not yet been with her five months. The announcement, as regarded Miss Shaw at least, was received with extravagant expressions of regret by most of the men. Old Madame Clinchaut's sentiments were not of much consequence, either way; and Madame de Belcour's satisfaction at the departure of the insolent young *Anglaise* who had treated her with such marked coldness, was too thinly coated with conventional phrases not to be apparent to every one. Had not the American's intercourse with Elizabeth been conspicuous in public for its austerity, madame's malevolence would certainly have sown broadcast seeds of suggestion that the brother, and not the sister, was the attraction that drew the English girl away to Mentone. But as, though seated next each other at table, they interchanged so few words—Elizabeth, indeed, spoke more to every one at table than to Mr. Baring—it was manifestly absurd to hint that he was the loadstone. Madame de Belcour and Anatole Doucet agreed that *l'Anglaise* was a hard, cold creature, with none of the instincts of her sex. This had been manifest by her treatment of him. Probably she belonged to that new strange set of women, touching whom they had heard and read something lately, as being

bent upon doing away with men, as far as the exigencies of human nature would permit. The professor, overhearing this, remarked that if in that wretched Albion there were many *décadent* poets, no wonder women became masculine.

As regards the Barings, it cannot be denied that the prospect of their departure was supported with fortitude. The other boarders seldom saw the Americans but at meal-times, and then they were regarded much like the cruet-stand in the centre of the table, supposed to contain oil, vinegar, and pepper, but practically useless. Those condiments were passed up and down and across the table: the decorative cruet-stand was never touched. Miss Baring could not be said to be decorative, but her small contribution to the social food was always oil—oil, rarely sharpened by the faintest dash of vinegar. Her brother was known to contain pepper—and red pepper, too—with which, on rare occasions, he had sprinkled the audience. But, as a rule, the stopper from the bottle was not removed. He bore in stolid silence with the conversation of men whom he could not respect, and one woman for whom he had a profound contempt. His remaining here so long had been a matter of necessity; his departure was, as regarded the pension, as much a relief to himself as to the society around him.

One day, a fortnight later, Monsieur Melchior called at Madame Martineau's. There, by a series of adroit inquiries, he elicited three facts. Miss Shaw had left Paris. Mr. Baring and his invalid sister had been inmates of the same pension. The three friends had gone together to Mentone.

He said to himself with a smile, as he turned away—

"I am balked for the moment. But when I am at Monte Carlo, by-and-by, I will follow it up. The drama is a little complicated, apparently, but it will amuse me to ferret it all out."

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

It is necessary to go back a fortnight, and follow George Daintree to England, in order to understand the course of events. On the morning of his arrival he stood by his uncle's bedside at Hampstead. Mr. Twisden was suffering from the severest fit of the gout he had ever known, and it was small consolation to the old man to be told by his doctor that it was "much better out than in." He devoutly wished it had remained "in" a few days longer. He had several cases on hand that required his attention, and among those that worried him most was that of Mr. William Shaw. His old client had written to say that, in consequence of his niece's conduct, he desired to alter his will. By the provisions of the existing one, his wife, besides her ample jointure, had a life-interest in his landed estate, which was to pass to Elizabeth at Mrs. Shaw's death. He now desired to leave it, and all his money in the funds, absolutely at his widow's disposal. His brother's child had a large fortune of her own; she had behaved with black ingratitude—she had cast him and his dear

wife off. He need no longer consider her, but reward his dear Molly for her unremitting devotion to him, by leaving more power in her hands at his death. The staunch old family solicitor saw clearly the influence that had been brought to bear on a weak mind, brooding for the past four months over his niece's defection. Could this evil influence be counteracted by any means? Only by Elizabeth herself, if she could be brought to return. George's letter had informed him of the amazing coincidence which had brought him and Miss Shaw together. He must see his nephew; he must sound him as to the girl's frame of mind; if expedient, he must send him down to Farley. In the mean time the new will was being engrossed; but Mr. Twisden was resolved to put as many delays in the way of its execution as possible. He regarded it as little short of iniquitous. William Shaw had not made one penny of the money himself; it was an inheritance from his father, and, as such, should in justice return to the only representative of the family. All this had been fully explained to George by his uncle after breakfast that morning. He now asked the young man if he could suggest any means whereby Miss Shaw could, in her own interests, be brought to England.

"My opinion is that nothing will bring her," replied the young man—"unless, perhaps, it were her uncle's dangerous illness. Of course, you understand that family matters were never touched on between us. She had no idea that I knew who she was, or had ever heard of Mr. William Shaw. But there could be no mistaking her horror at the thought of returning to England."

"Then there is nothing to be done. For, even if it were

not for this confounded foot, my going down to Farley would be of no good. He writes to-day, urging me to be expeditious with the draft of the will, and suggesting that you should go there with it, if I cannot."

"Have you any idea what caused Miss Shaw to leave her uncle's house in this strange way?"

"I may have an *idea*. I have no knowledge; and if I had, I should not be at liberty to tell you. I may say this, however. I have not a good opinion of Mrs. Shaw. I have a great regard for William Shaw himself; but you know what he is—good-natured, well-meaning, easily influenced. His wife may have driven Miss Shaw from the house by some devilry or other, on purpose to bring this very thing about—I mean, to induce her husband to alter his will."

"I see. It is not impossible. I never believed that rumour of her having escaped to prevent being forced into a marriage she abhorred. Girls can't be forced in the present day."

"Especially such a girl as Miss Shaw. Did it seem to you that Lord Robert made any way in his suit? Curious his finding her out in Paris! I certainly never told him she was there."

"She was annoyed at first. Afterwards she got over it, but he made no way. He has only been there a few days, and yesterday, when I wished him good-bye, he said he feared he should have to return to England immediately. He is not the sort of man to waste his time. I saw at once that he had met with no encouragement. Miss Shaw is not ambitious."

"Not for mere position; and money she has. Yet I

take it, she wants a man with brains, and therefore Lord Robert——"

"His order of brains does not appeal to her. She prefers a more artistic temperament."

"Artistic? Dear me! Was there any one at the pension, whom—whom she seemed at all drawn towards?"

"She was intimate with an American girl, and through her she saw something of her brother. But they did not hit it off particularly well. Frankly, I think she preferred talking to me to any other man. As she said herself, our views on art were so very much the same."

He said this with intention, watching his uncle's face closely as he spoke. The old lawyer looked up shrewdly.

"God bless my soul! Perhaps it is as well you came away. It would never do to have her falling in love with *you*, George!"

The young man paused a moment. "Why should it not do, supposing I fell in love with her?"

"Nonsense! I could never tolerate it for a moment. People would at once say it was a plot I had hatched—especially as you went there under an assumed name. No; it would never do. You forget I am her trustee, and literally the only person on whom she does rely."

"Cannot she rely on me, as your nephew? Sooner or later, she must learn who I really am."

"You have not been encouraging any foolish ideas of this kind, George?" Mr. Twisden looked sternly at his nephew. "I repeat—I would never tolerate it. You have, by accident, made the young lady's acquaintance. Henceforward, except in matters of business, I do not wish you to have anything more to say to her."

"Is not this rather hard, uncle? Why should Miss Shaw and I not be friends? There is no disparity in our station, that I can see; and why, because you are her solicitor and trustee, your nephew is the only man who must avoid her, I cannot understand. As to my dropping my real name at the pension, she will see at once why I did so. When I learnt she was there, knowing that she wished to remain unknown, I thought it would annoy her to find your nephew—for she knew my name, though not my face—under the same roof. We have parted good friends; nothing more. But I should regret to think that I was forbidden ever to meet her again upon the same footing."

"I can't forbid your being good friends with Miss Shaw—how can I? If I die, you will have the conduct of her affairs, I suppose, and it is very advisable that you *should* be good friends. But I won't have any of these meetings at pensions—it may be dangerous."

"There seems no chance of it at present, sir," replied George, stiffly; and, taking up some letters on another case, he turned his uncle's attention into a different current.

The following morning brought a few lines again from William Shaw. Neither Mr. Twisden nor his nephew need trouble himself to come to Farley; he was not feeling very well, and his wife urged his seeing a London physician. He would run up to town for a night, and if Mr. Twisden was not able to be in Gray's Inn the following day, Mr. Shaw would drive down to Hampstead to see him. Thereupon Mr. Twisden, believing, like

George, that here was the one chance of bringing Elizabeth to England, wired to her—

"Your uncle ill in London and alone. Important for your interests you should see him at once. Pray come."

Elizabeth's reply by post the next day was—

"Dear Mr. Twisden,

"I am very sorry, but it is impossible for me to meet my dear uncle at present. I regret this doubly, as you say he is ill. As to my 'interests,' if you mean that I run the risk, by my absence, of forfeiting my uncle's inheritance, I can truly assure you that the possession of money has brought with it so much disillusion to me, that I have no desire to be burthened with more. If you think well, pray tell my uncle this. I hope to see him often in years to come; but not at present. Explanations would be demanded of me now which I cannot give. The only escape from this is a long separation, during which the wound he has suffered at my hand may be partially healed, and the cause which led me to inflict it will cease to be a matter of any interest to him.

"Lord Robert Elton has been here—and is gone. I had more than one conversation with him, the result of which I hope may be that we shall continue to be friends. Between him and me there could never be any strong sympathy. But, in spite of all his oddity, I rather like him.

"Sincerely yours,

"Elizabeth Shaw.

"P.S.—I have just decided to go to Mentone for the winter with a sick friend who is ordered there. We shall

leave Paris in about three days, after which my address will be 'Poste Restante, Mentone.' I hope to hear from you that my uncle is much better."

Mr. Twisden, in announcing Miss Shaw's rejection of his proposal to George Daintree, took good care not to mention the decision named in her postscript. If the young man still entertained any foolish idea of renewing his intimacy at Madame Martineau's pension during the winter, he would find the attraction fled. For the rest, if Elizabeth was resolute not to come back, Mr. Twisden was as well pleased that she should go South.

William Shaw was detained some days in London by his doctor, and during that time paid two visits to Hampstead. On the first occasion the old solicitor did his utmost to persuade his client not to alter his will. After pointing out that Shaw's money should not go out of the family as long as a Shaw by blood was alive, he went on—

"There is another point, perhaps, you have not considered. Your widow would possibly marry again, and equally possibly marry a worthless man. Women, you know, my dear Shaw, are weak on such subjects. Leaving your fortune to her absolutely, as you do, what happens? Supposing her to marry an unprincipled fellow; either he will squander her money during her lifetime—possibly upon other women—or make her leave him every penny of it at her death. Can you wish this? I speak to you as an old friend—not as your solicitor, whose sole business is to carry out your instructions."

William fidgeted in his chair; his red face grew one

shade redder. He raised one shaky hand to his collar, as though he felt it tight.

"You see, Twisden," he began, "'twould ha' been all right if my niece hadn't run away like that. If she had married the colonel, as we wished her——"

"What has her not marrying the colonel to do with it?" interrupted the other. "Your leaving your money away from your niece, after telling your brother it should be hers if you had no children, is not to be justified by the plea that she threw over a man whom I suppose she found she did not care about. Admitted that she did this in a foolish way; admitted that she ought not to have run away—that she is self-willed, obstinate, unreasonable;—all this is not sufficient cause for disinheriting her."

"Elizabeth is well enough off, you see, Twisden, without my money; and when I told Anthony I should leave it to her, after my wife's death, I thought she would be like a daughter to me. I'm sure I've felt like a father to her ever since Anthony died. But she has cast me off, Twisden, and, as my wife says, how can I consider her as a child now? My wife is a sensible woman—she would never do anything foolish when I am gone; but she may make other ties. I'm not saying anything against that; it's but natural. She's thirty years younger than I, Twisden; and I may go any day—I know that. She has been a good little wife to me, and it's but fair and right that she should be rewarded."

"A life-interest in the whole of your fortune would surely be thought very liberal! However, if you have made up your mind, I have nothing more to say."

"I have promised, Shaw; I can't go back from my word," he replied rather indistinctly. Then he drew out his large silk pocket-handkerchief and blew his nose with violence.

"The new will will be ready for your signature to-morrow. But"—here Mr. Twisden paused a moment and looked his old friend full in the face—"in case you ever wish it destroyed, I shall keep the old one to be acted upon."

"All right—all right," returned William Shaw, with a kind of nervous precipitation. "You can keep the old one, if it's only to show why I altered it, and—and I can tell my wife when I go home that it's done."

Poor old William! He returned to Farley two days later, patched up for the time being by his doctor, and easy in the knowledge that he would have a radiant welcome when he announced that the new will was actually signed.

A fortnight later, at a meet of the hounds, he heard a rumour that Colonel Wybrowe's engagement to the American heiress was at an end. It was said that the girl's father had refused to settle a large sum upon his future son-in-law, and that Wybrowe would not marry without this The transaction was said to have been carried on upon purely mercantile principles: so much for so much. Miss Krupp was greatly taken with the colonel's fine appearance and social standing. As the wife of a man not only highly connected, but the darling of so many drawing-rooms in the very highest circles, she was assured that her "position" would be better than that of many a peeress. If so worldly a little nature

could be said to be in love, she was so—with the idea of becoming Mrs. Wybrowe. But the colonel was a practical man, and would stand no nonsense. The pill was very distasteful; he must be well paid, or he would not swallow it. And so there was a rupture.

William Shaw, had he been a man of any observation, would have seen that all this was no news to his wife. Mrs. Shaw regretted the failure of their poor friend's matrimonial prospects, but expressed no surprise. Her husband wondered whether the colonel would try to forget the past, and would pay them a visit at Farley, where he had been so shamefully treated less than six months ago. Mrs. Shaw thought that "a little later, perhaps," when time had softened bitter recollections, he might be persuaded to come. Her tone throughout, it may here be added, was always that his affections had been cruelly wounded by Elizabeth's conduct, and that pique alone had driven him to propose to Miss Krupp.

Her good easy husband took his cue from her. The colonel's engagement to his niece had been one of sentiment, that to the heiress one of reason. He pitied him; he never for an instant doubted the fortune-hunter's singleness of purpose. The firm, gallant soldier, who had been "a bit wild, maybe, in his youth," had been deceived and disappointed in his honest attachment, and had then recklessly offered himself to the girl who had "thrown herself at his head," as Mrs. Shaw expressed it. William felt as if he were almost responsible for his ward's treatment of the ill-used man. They must testify their sympathy for him as best they could, and assure him that he would always be welcome at Farley.

CHAPTER II.

ELIZABETH SHAW was in the corner of a second-class compartment in the Marseilles train. Opposite her, huddled up, was the fragile form and white face of Hatty Baring. Her brother sat in the further corner, reading a book. The intermediate seats were filled, and emptied, and refilled again with farmers, peasants, *commis-voyageurs*, and small townsfolk; some with children, some with fowls in baskets, some with packages, mostly tied up in thin black oilcloth. On Elizabeth's knees was a book, but she was not reading. She was lost in thought, and had been so for the last hour. They flew past long rows of poplars, stretches of flat champagne country, high-roofed, many-windowed houses, surrounded by farm lands, and dignified by the name of *châteaux*, church-towers, villages, and streams; but though, with the eyes of the flesh, she saw these things, the eyes of the mind beheld a different panorama.

A letter from Mr. Twisden, before she left Paris, had reassured her as to her uncle's health for the time being. But it was easy to read between the lines. Mr. Twisden was troubled about his old friend. Of course he never touched upon the will, nor alluded to the passage in her

letter which had assured him how indifferent she was to her own "interests." That subject, indeed, never troubled her; but her uncle's possible misery did. How would that vile woman treat him, now that Elizabeth was gone? Were his eyes being opened gradually to her real character? Was Mr. Twisden's evident solicitude about his old friend due to this? She could not ask him; there was no one of whom she could inquire as to her poor Uncle William's domestic happiness. She must remain silent, ignorant of all concerning him, beyond the bare fact that his bodily health was better. She had not thought so much of the kind and credulous old man of Farley, and of all the secret disgrace attaching to it for many weeks, as she now did in the long silent hours of the journey.

She never doubted but that the course she had taken —that of cutting herself entirely adrift from her moorings —was the wisest, indeed the only one, under the circumstances. But if those circumstances changed? As long as her uncle's wife remained at Farley, it never could be Elizabeth's duty to return there. But if Mrs. Shaw should die, or that her treachery were discovered, and she were driven from her husband's house, Elizabeth knew that it would be her duty to return there, and take up her life again with the old man, at whatsoever cost. And the cost would be great. Now she had learnt what a life, untrammelled by conventions, unweighted by "social duties," meant; above all, now that she knew what friendship was, and what colour and savour it lent to existence, a return to the sleek commonplaces of acquaintanceship, the dull routine of a country neighbourhood, the fat even pastures of mediocrity would be

well-nigh intolerable. But for her dear dead father's sake, the girl said the sacrifice should be made. Uncle William belonged to him, so to speak. He had done his best to replace her father, and if he were left desolate, it would be her duty to return to him: that was clear.

Other things, perhaps, were not so clear. In thinking of all she would lose by such a sacrifice, Elizabeth, notwithstanding her curiously direct and unflinching insight into cause and effect, failed to give due prominence to the figure which occupied so considerable a space in the foreground of her present life. She would have scorned the idea that the image of Alaric Baring had in the smallest degree influenced her decision to accompany his sister to Mentone. Nor was it so. She had conceived a strong affection for Hatty; and constituted as Elizabeth was, it was obvious that whithersoever her friend was sent, she, too, must go. What did friendship mean, if one deserted a friend in the hour of need? The poor fragile American would require a woman's care; and Elizabeth, not feeling herself called to England by duty, did not hesitate to throw over her studies in Paris, and accompany her. Nevertheless, the interest of the journey, the pleasure in the interchange of a few words, breaking, now and again, long spells of silence, these were due to the presence of one whose influence was daily gaining an ascendency, unperceived, over the girl.

He did not talk much. He generally sat, as now, in the further corner of the carriage, absorbed, or seemingly absorbed, in his book. But it was not in the nature of things that their intercourse should any longer be as restrained as it had been at Madame Martineau's. He still set a

guard upon his tongue, but neither from mistrust, nor dread of the girl's scorn. He judged her more justly now. The devotion to his sister, which had prompted Elizabeth to accompany Hatty on this journey, had touched her brother deeply. There must, after all, be something noble in the nature capable of making such sacrifices, with absolutely no return. For he recognized fully all she was giving up to come to Mentone. And with his truer appreciation of the girl's character, his fear of seeming to take advantage of his position, as Hatty's brother, to advance in an intimacy which might be distasteful to her, somewhat diminished. There were times when he forgot himself—when he became absorbed in the discussion of subjects started by Elizabeth, and when his eloquence had a persuasive charm which she had never before felt, or even suspected. He had, indeed, like so many cultivated Americans, a rare gift of language, united, in his case, with that yet rarer gift of a fervid imagination. Elizabeth had, from the first, been conscious of the man's power, and had struggled against it, with only a superficial success. Though she might contradict him point-blank, and declare to herself, as to others, that she would never bow down to his autocratic judgments, far down in her heart there was a conviction of the real force of a character, which it irritated her to think she could not fathom. Until lately he had never allowed her to see below the surface. But the thin coating of ice which covered the fluent depths of love and sympathy in his nature had melted in the warmth generated by Elizabeth's constant presence. Up to this time he had seen her mostly in the company of others—others whom

he despised, and before whom he rarely opened his lips. At Fontainebleau there had been but *one* other, it is true; his dislike, and mistrust of that unit, however, were quite enough to prevent his ever "letting himself go," as Hatty expressed it. What that acute little personage had foreseen, had now come to pass. Her brother did himself more justice in the eyes of her friend, during this short journey, than he had ever done during their four months' residence together at Madame Martineau's.

Elizabeth's untiring thoughtfulness for his sister moved him to look upon this young woman, so wayward, so wilful, so eager for amusement and admiration, no matter from what tainted source, with very different eyes from those with which he had hitherto insisted on regarding her. It was no momentary impulse that had led her to leave Paris, for Hatty's sake; every hour of the day showed that her interest in the poor little invalid never flagged. She thought of everything that could tend to Hatty's comfort long before Alaric himself. It was she who hired the extra pillow, when she saw how weary Hatty was growing. It was she who jumped out, and fetched Hatty some water and *sirop de groseille*, while Alaric smoked his cigarette, and stretched his legs on the platform. All these little things were not lost upon him, and led him to reflect profoundly on the greater altruism of woman. And in the evening, when they were huddled round the wood fire at Avignon, listening to the fierce wind that came howling down from the Alps, and trying *not* to listen to Hatty's increased cough, his tongue was unloosed, and he told them wonderful stories that made Elizabeth's hair stand on end, and

evoked a little dry protest of incredulity from his sister.

On the third day only—for they travelled very slowly, on Hatty's account—they reached Mentone. Their rooms were secured at one of the less fashionable hotels, standing high in the town, surrounded by a little orange garden, and commanding the bay, with its jutting promontory of discoloured houses, its campanile, its brown fishing-boats and purple sea, melting, as they first saw it, into a golden sky.

They found here all they looked for—more, perhaps, than they had a right to expect. For the small hotel was almost empty; and the inevitable clergyman and his wife (with a white "Dolly Varden" cap), the amiable spinster who purred over her knitting, and one melancholy man who defied classification, for he seemed to belong to nothing and to nowhere, were the only persons they ever saw at the table d'hôte. Elizabeth's fears were allayed. There was no rabble of noisy tourists, with the risk, attaching thereto, of recognition from some north-country acquaintance. A sleepy routine pervaded everything, and our trio slid into it contentedly. They hired two rooms hard by; one where Alaric could work, the other, nominally, for the two girls. But, for the present, at least, it was impossible Hatty should paint. She could not stand for very long; she could not walk at all. She lay for hours, in a long cane chair, in the sunshine, among the orange trees and violets, with a book, where the good parson and his wife—a black mushroom hat replacing her "Dolly Varden"—always found her, on their outward walk, and stopped to say

a few words, empty of all but kindness, to the poor invalid, so thin, so drawn, so moth-eaten in appearance. The spinster, with her ball of red worsted, to which she seemed as inseparably riven as a galley-slave to his chain, also visited Hatty in the garden from time to time; so she was not too lonely during the hours her companions were away. She could not talk much; it made her cough; and she had her book and her thoughts for companions—above all, her thoughts.

She had no illusions about herself. She was visibly weaker than she had been a month ago. At this rate, her term of life would be short. But, on every account, she desired to conceal the rapid advance of her malady as much as possible from Alaric and Elizabeth. She never complained; she received them always on their return with a smile; she evinced the greatest interest in their work; she talked of the studies she should make in the approaching spring. Alaric was, in some measure, blinded. Not so Elizabeth. The woman to whom she had grown so attached, if she saw the spring burst, would still be an invalid. Her day for work—the work she loved so well, and so futilely, poor soul!—was done. She might live on for years: Elizabeth had heard of frail creatures, with both lungs affected, clinging tenaciously to life. But she could not conceal from herself that, in Hatty's case, the disease made rapid progress. Still, the mutual deception common in such cases was kept up; the women trying to deceive each other, both of them anxious to deceive the man.

Elizabeth had, at first, meant to devote herself entirely to her friend; painting was to go to the wall. But she

soon saw that this was a misfake. Hatty was worried, and inquired querulously twenty times a day why Elizabeth did not get a studio? Alaric had found one; why couldn't she? What was the use of fidgeting around her? She was far better alone. And so indeed she was for many hours, being a self-contained little person, without nerves, or fancies, to need either constant stimulant or sympathy. She derived great comfort from the certainty that the two whom she desired so earnestly to see drawn more and more closely together, at least understood each other better, day by day. As regarded Alaric, she could go further than this. The admiration he had avowed for Miss Shaw, some weeks back, being now purged of the mistrust with which it had been qualified, had surely ripened into something warmer and stronger. She knew her brother so well, she watched him so closely, she could not be deceived. Reticent as he was, there was an expression now and again in his eyes which told her that passion, so slowly kindled in him, was now burning in the place of colder and critical feeling. He might fight against it, he might refuse to allow, voluntarily, of its expression by word or deed; it escaped him by outlets which the vigilant Hatty never failed to note. Alaric was growing to love this girl with all the force of his strong nature.

Of Elizabeth, up to this time, she could only predicate that Alaric's character would make itself to be appreciated more and more as his true self appeared—that inner self which was not only impervious to assaults from the world at large, but had presented an exterior absolutely repellent at moments. Between this better understanding of

the man and anything like love there was, in Elizabeth's case, as Hatty well knew, a long road to be traversed. Of her English friend's past she knew as little now as she did four months ago. Elizabeth was not given to "confidences," and the circumstances of her case were such as to render her additionally reluctant to speak of the life from which she had severed herself by a stroke of that sharp sword we call determination.

All the same, it was impossible that so keen and interested an observer of those she loved as Miss Baring should fail to note the bitterness with which her friend spoke of men in general, of family ties, of reliance on any human being but one's self. It was far better to remain single, to trust to no one. Hatty had chosen the wiser part. But here the little American always stopped her peremptorily.

"Don't say that; it is quite a mistake. I have not *chosen* my part; Nature gave it me. At your age I could have loved. I did not think then that to be an old maid was the better part. But no man ever made love to me, and common sense came to my aid. I looked in the glass; I understood it, and I reconciled myself to my lot. Happily, Alaric wanted me. I was not useless, nor lonely, when our mother died. I had never known what it was to live for myself; and when I came to him I had an object, an interest, still in life. Ah, dear, whether you live *by* yourself or not, don't live *for* yourself. Don't think that painting and ambition will fill up all your life; it won't. There is nothing worth living for but to share our joys and troubles with another."

Then Elizabeth would reply that she had no intention

of living a selfish life; she would always take an active interest in others. Had not Hatty reproached her with throwing herself too readily into the *mêlée* at Madame Martineau's? She hoped to do some good in her generation, by-and-by; to help her fellow-creatures to the best of her abilities, in some way; only she did not believe in being dependent on any one human being for happiness, any more than for daily bread, if one was able to earn the loaf for one's self.

Elizabeth found an old peasant woman to sit to her. Alaric went down to the shore, and made studies of the fishermen and their boats. Thus the first three weeks passed. Then came a spell of bad weather, ending in a light fall of snow, all of which visibly increased Hatty's cough. She could not leave her room, and Elizabeth and Alaric went together to the table d'hôte. He said, at luncheon, looking out of the window at the driving sleet—

"Another day lost. As I can't paint, I shall go to Monte Carlo, and look at the place. Will you come?"

"No; I am afraid of meeting some one I know."

He smiled. "I hope that I may—a possible sitter. What am I to do here if this weather continues?"

"Paint some of the peasants; they will be sure to sell. There is a class of traveller that always rises to the bait of a peasant, especially a pretty peasant."

"How low you rate me," he replied, amused. "A painter of pretty peasants for the travellers' market! Well, I will go and cast my nets into the turbid waters of Monte Carlo."

And he went. He wandered aimlessly through the

damp, steaming crowd—the painted ladies, the unspeakable men—gathered round the tables in the hot gambling-rooms. He looked at these poor human pawns with more curiosity than at the moves they elected to make upon the green cloth; the nervous fingers following the eager, hungry eyes, to rake in a few francs, or, when these were swept away into the great central vortex, sending more to follow them, after sundry prickings of a card. By-and-by he was tapped on the shoulder by a fellow-countryman.

"Why, what are you doing here, Baring? Come here for a plunge, eh?"

"No; I never play. I am over from Mentone, just to have a look round, as it is a wet day. Humanity always interests me to watch. Any notorieties you can point out?"

"There is 'Casse-noisette' opposite, in the pink hat, sitting down and playing like the devil. But you have seen her before? And she is not much to look at, after all. She must have lost ten thousand francs this afternoon, if she has lost a penny. It has all gone into the pockets of that fellow with a black beard—he must be a Jew, I take it—who has been having a tremendous coup. If he goes on like this, he'll break the bank."

"I can't see him, for all those confounded big hats and plumes. Who is he?"

"Don't know. He only came yesterday, I am told. Played last night, and carried away twenty thousand francs, and has been winning all this afternoon again. He is as cool as a cucumber. It's great sport to watch all the women making up to him. There is a break in the crowd. You can see him now."

Those who believe in "influences" might have declared that Baring's was "malignant" to the gambler. He happened to look up, and caught the American's eye. From that moment his vein of good luck seemed to be exhausted. He lost three or four times consecutively.

"I know him," said Alaric. "His name is Melchior, and he is a so-called patron of art—has a collection of modern pictures and a magnificent hotel in Paris, I believe; but I have never been inside it."

The object of their attention wore an engraved emerald —a gem of great value—in his violet-satin tie. His button-hole was a large pink carnation. Though he was dressed in a brown cut-away coat, he still had the air of being more rigidly restrained beneath it than the pliant "Cheviot," innocent of any wrinkle, warranted. On the little finger of one hand was a large diamond; on the other a massive snake, with a ruby head. He paid little attention to any one, but glanced up at Baring, as if to make sure of his identity. A few minutes later he rose, after sweeping up the pile of gold and several notes that yet remained of his gains.

"My luck has turned. It is useless going on any more now," he said to the man near him. Then he sauntered round the table, pursued by two fair ladies, to whom he occasionally threw a word, till he came to where the Americans were standing.

"So, Mr. Baring, we meet here," he said, in remarkably good English. "Are you painting in these parts? I little expected to find you at Monte Carlo."

To some men it is easier to tell a purposeless lie than to speak the truth.

Alaric explained that he was at Mentone with a sick sister.

"Mentone is a dull hole. You two alone there? I pity you."

"My sister has a friend with her, and I am painting all day long."

"Have you anything to show me if I come over? I admired greatly that 'Venetian Senator' I saw at Jacob's just before I left Paris. He told me it was sold, or I would have bought it."

"I have nothing at present but some rough studies. I hope to find a good head worth making a picture of in the course of time."

"Do you ever take portraits? Would you care to take me? As an order, of course—as an order."

The Israelite was, in his own way, such a very paintable object, that Baring had no difficulty with his conscience in declaring that nothing he should like better.

"What do you charge for a head and shoulders?"

Alaric named his price, and Melchior said at once—

"All right. I can find time to sit to you here better than in Paris. I can come over to you in the mornings as often as you like for the next fortnight. And we can breakfast together afterwards."

"Our table d'hôte breakfast would not be good enough for you, I think," said Alaric, rather dryly.

"Oh, I am not so particular!" returned the other, laughing. "I shall not mind what I eat, if you succeed in making a fine portrait—something in the 'Venetian Senator' line, eh? Carolus-Durand, Bonnat—they have all had a try at me. How shall I be dressed? I have a *grenat* velvet smoking-suit I can bring—if——"

"Thank you. That is unnecessary. I prefer a black or dark-brown coat, such as you are wearing."

"All right. Shall I come to-morrow, then?"

"Certainly." He pulled out a card. "You will find me at this address as early as you can make it convenient to be over."

Alaric returned to Mentone, well satisfied with his chance—as he deemed it—which had procured for him exactly the sort of order he most desired. He could not be said to have cast a net into those turbid waters—this big fish had leapt, unsolicited, into his arms. He saw, in his mind's eye, how Moretto or Morone would have offered a presentation of the splendidly coloured Jew's head, purged of its vulgarity, but retaining all its keenness and vigilance of outlook. It would be his own fault, Alaric felt, if he did not produce a very striking portrait—one which should raise him in public estimation.

He had sore need of this just now, for the future looked dark enough. Hatty might live for years, he said to himself; but it might be necessary for her to move from one health-resort to another; and how were funds for all this to be provided unless the public showed greater avidity to secure his work, and thus enable him to ask higher terms? As to that other possibility, the thought of which had of late been forcing its way from the heart upwards to the brain, and insisting on being entertained—the possibility that Elizabeth Shaw might grow to love him—the possibility that he might one day be in a position to ask her to be his—he put it away from him, as often and as resolutely as he could. For was not the accomplishment of such a daydream wholly dependent on this

sordid question of ways and means? It might be, as Hatty believed, that her friend had some little fortune of her own; but he, Alaric, had nothing—absolutely nothing but what he could make. And never would he ask a woman to be his wife, unless he knew that his income was adequate to support them both.

On his return, the two young women were greatly excited with the news he brought. Hatty had heard of the rich Monsieur Melchior, and his fine gallery of pictures. That he should sit to her brother would be the making of Alaric—he would spring lightly and quickly up the ladder of fame, she was sure. Elizabeth's face beamed with pleasure.

"I hope he is not *too* ugly," she said. "A rich Jew sounds like a pendulous nose and protruding under-lip."

"On the contrary, he is decidedly handsome. Not very good style, perhaps—inclined to gorgeous jewellery and brilliant apparel—and I am not sure that the expression of the face is a good one; but there is plenty of it—that is the main thing. Many of the finest portraits in existence are of men one wouldn't make intimate friends of."

"But I hope you *will* find it possible to make an intimate friend of him," said Hatty. "His coming up to you like that, when you did not even bow to him, shows that he is drawn towards you; and if he gets to like you more and more, as he must, if you will make yourself pleasant to him, he may be of great service to you, dear."

"You are getting horribly worldly," said her brother, laughing. "You would never have said that when you were in New England. It is all the demoralizing influence of Paris."

CHAPTER III.

About ten o'clock the next morning—the rain had cleared off, the sun was shining brightly—Elizabeth saw from her window what she told Hatty was "a study in furs," walk into the house in which Alario had his painting room. The French Jew had arrayed himself in a seal-skin cap and coat, the morning being cold, while an orange *cache-nez* gave the accent of colour which he held essential to the intonation of his good looks.

"What do you say to this?" he began, as he entered the studio. "The treatment of the seal-skin would give you a fine opportunity, eh? Something à la Rembrandt? Do you fancy it?"

"You are not venerable enough to be painted à la Rembrandt," said Baring, smiling. Then humouring the man's vanity with an implied and pardonable compliment, he continued, "I want to devote myself entirely to your head; to think of nothing else at first; to make it palpitating with life; to get those rich tones of the flesh which are so rare, and so splendid, from a painter. The dress, the background, will take care of themselves. Plain black, as unobtrusive as possible, and a grey wall, I fancy. But those are after-considerations."

He placed his sitter in various lights, looked at him at various angles, till he had satisfied himself which was the most favourable aspect the Jew should wear for posterity. Melchior showed no impatience. Vanity, like charity, covers a multitude of — ennuis. And when the sketch was once begun, he talked away amusingly enough of men at Monte Carlo, and their mis-adventures —no, he corrected himself,—their *madam*-adventures, their cheatings, and pilferings, and quarrels. The painter noted the hard, wicked sparkle in his sitter's eyes, which had never obtruded itself on his attention before. To give full force and character to the face, that expression must be transferred to his canvas.

Of course Melchior had determined that nothing should prevent his breakfasting with the Baring trio at the table d'hôte. The thought paramount in his mind during the two hours he sat to Alaric was how he should meet the English girl who fired his passion three weeks or a month before, supposing she recognized him. He had been too precipitate on that occasion. She had been offended. He must learn Baring's exact position towards her, before deciding how the secret he had surprised could be best turned to his own advantage. This he foresaw might be difficult. The case, apparently, was a complicated one. A girl art-student—and, therefore, presumably poor—purchasing clandestinely the picture of this man, whose sister was her friend, and with whom she must be living on terms of some intimacy. His vicious imagination would probably have suggested the very closest intimacy, had not all the probabilities of the mystery been against such a supposition. For one fact

he did clearly elicit in reply to his direct question; Alaric had no idea who was the present owner of his "Venetian Senator."

Though her cough was no better, Hatty appeared at breakfast; for, as she said, the sun was hot, and thoroughly warmed the dining-room; and she was sure it could do her no harm to come downstairs. Her real motives—curiosity, and reluctance that Elizabeth should appear, even momentarily, in a false position, as Alaric's companion—she did not reveal. In America such a chance would cause no animadversion; but she had been long enough on the Continent to know that here it was not so. This stranger must not misjudge her friend or Alaric, which a Frenchman of Monsieur Melchior's stamp was so likely to do. She was nearer the truth than she imagined, poor little woman! and Elizabeth was possibly a gainer in consideration at the unscrupulous millionaire's hands.

Without her hat he thought her even handsomer than he had in Jacob's shop; her head, with its waving black hair, was so finely shaped, and rose so nobly from its stem. Nothing could be simpler than her dress, and she did not wear an ornament of any description, in notable contrast to the bejewelled ladies whose society he mostly frequented, and so many of whom fluttered round him at Monte Carlo.

She bowed gravely, without a gleam of recognition, as Alaric presented the gorgeous Jew to Miss Shaw, and suggested that she should sit between them at table. Hatty was coughing so much that it was better to place her on the other side of her brother, where she need not

talk. But she found occasion to whisper to him in the course of the meal, after screwing her head round several times, and glaring at the stranger through her *pince-nez*—

"I don't like his face, Ally. I am sorry. I hope he is better than he looks."

On the other side, Melchior had opened the conversation with infinite discretion. There was nothing in his tone or manner, at first, to recall the impudent individual in Jacob's shop, on whom she had bestowed no more than an indignant glance, and who had passed straightway out of her mind. Towards the end of breakfast he fell into that snare of the underbred, and became more familiar.

"You don't know Monte Carlo? You must come over with Mr. Baring and breakfast with me there, and I will take you round the tables. You shall play for me, if you like, and——"

"I should not like it at all, thank you," she interrupted.

"Why not? I am having a wonderful run of luck. I won again last night. If you play for me, we'll go shares. What do you say to that, mademoiselle?"

Elizabeth checked the impetuous rejoinder that rose to her lips. She did not wish to offend Alaric Baring's sitter. She must let him down gently.

"Miss Baring is not strong enough to go to Monte Carlo, and I do not leave her."

"What a beautiful case of female devotion!" Here he showed his brilliant white teeth. "It is a pity, for you might make a lot of friends there; and then, if you sent your pictures over, we'd get up a raffle for them. Will you show me your work presently?"

"If you wish it. But you must not expect much. I am only a student, at present."

Thus began the acquaintance. Of course he bought her "Old Peasant Woman" for the very modest sum she asked; and though Hatty and Alaric were both pleased at this, the artist herself hardly experienced more than a qualified sense of gratification. Her first picture sold! Why was she not more elated? The explanation was not far to seek. She had a secret conviction that her picture was not bought for its intrinsic merit, but in order that the purchaser should make himself "pleasant." She revolted against that. She wished she could refuse to part with the picture; but how to do so, without betraying to the Barings the fact that she was indifferent to the money! And in proportion as Melchior grew more familiar, she became less tolerant of his vulgarity. Still she contrived, with some self-restraint, to be perfectly civil to him. And at last he departed.

Then she and Alaric were left alone; and they looked at each other. At last he said—

"One would like all one's transactions with a man like that to be purely business ones. One does not feel like receiving him as a friend."

"Why should one?"

"It is difficult to avoid. If he insists on breakfasting here after his sittings, how can I prevent him?"

"You can't," she said quickly. "As a patron of the Arts," she added, laughing, "we must both be grateful to him; but in any other light, I think—I think I had rather not see too much of him."

"You shall not, if I can help it. He is a man who has

not lived much with ladies, I fancy. But as a model he is invaluable. A splendid head for colour!"

"A sort of vulgar Mephistopheles. I suppose he will 'paint' well; but I should not like to do it."

"I am glad you were not called upon," he said, smiling, "because I mean to make a fine thing of him."

When Hatty was alone with her brother later in the day, she eyed him narrowly as she observed—

"Your Jew friend admires Elizabeth Shaw very much, I am sure."

"She does not return the compliment," he returned coolly.

"I thought her wonderfully patient with him, considering. Of course it was on your account, Ally. But I have known girls begin in that way and end by—by toleration."

"What are you driving at, my astute Hatty? You are not insulting Miss Shaw by supposing that for the value of Melchior's wealth she would ever marry him, if he asked her?"

She saw that her desire to rouse a little wholesome jealousy in his mind had carried her too far.

"No," she replied, taking off her *pince-nez*, and wiping it, the more clearly to scrutinize Alaric's face; "only I think a man of that kind might presume upon her tolerance, and that, I am sure, you would be sorry for. I take back all I said yesterday, about wishing you to be intimate with him."

"You need not be afraid; I don't much like him. But until his portrait is finished I suppose he will be here every day, so we must make the best of him."

We believe the devil to be sharp-sighted, but his disciples, at least, are occasionally baffled by conduct of which they cannot even conceive the mainsprings. Melchior watched Alaric Baring and Elizabeth closely. He had seldom before come into contact with a man of the American painter's temperament; never with a woman pure-minded and independent of action, with a pride and force of will to conceal her natural inclinations, as Elizabeth did before him. He had come prepared to find that the girl nourished a hopeless passion for the painter, whose cold nature probably did not respond to hers; or it might be just the contrary. As the brother of her friend she might be anxious to help him in every way, short of giving him the love he asked. For love, as conceived by Melchior, was nothing but an animal passion, which could not long support the strain of companionship without possession. The attitude of these two persons towards each other did not fit in with either of these theories. He found the man and girl apparently mutually cool and friendly, with no evidence of restraint, no expression of unacknowledged misery, no attempt to attract on either side. The women were friends, and the English one, with that whimsical benevolence of which he had heard before now, chose secretly to purchase her friend's brother's picture—with money how obtained? How? Oh, she had probably a rich lover, who occasionally gave her leave of absence to indulge her eccentricity and romance by wandering about alone, ostensibly to study painting. This would hardly be possible, indeed, were the lover a Frenchman; but the English were such a strange nation, there was no saying what one of them

would not do. It was this conclusion to which the astute Jew arrived after the third or fourth day.

The portrait being ready painted in Alaric Baring's mind, its progress on canvas was rapid. There was no hesitation, no "*pentimento.*" He knew what he wanted to do, and each stroke told. Elizabeth felt a glow of pleasure when she saw it after the fourth sitting. It seemed to her a really masterly portrait, finely modelled, and instinct with life. Melchior, who stood by, asked if she thought it did him justice. She replied that it almost persuaded her to become an impressionist, it was so admirable. It was the finest work she had seen of Mr. Baring's. Finer than the "Venetian Senator?" he inquired, watching her with a curious smile. Yes, finer than the "Venetian Senator," she answered, without wincing.

At this moment Alaric was called out of the room, and Melchior, taking advantage of his absence, said rapidly in a low voice—

"If you think this the finer picture, mademoiselle, shall we exchange?"

"Exchange! What do you mean?" She turned sharply round.

"You possess the 'Venetian Senator,'" he whispered, smiling.

She flushed to the roots of her hair. "Who told you so? Not Mr. Baring?"

"No; I learnt it by accident."

"And you have told no one?"

"No one," he replied, still with that Satanic smile. "The secret is ours. It is delightful to have a secret

with *you*. I am sorry for poor Baring, as I showed by ordering this portrait. You and I together may help him and his sister to live, eh? You have some one who supplies you with money?"—this with a peculiarly offensive leer—"and you are charitable. Well, let *me* be your banker, instead of that other one. The Barings shall have all they want, and not know where it comes from."

Before she had time to more than flash an indignant rejoinder from her dark eyes, Alaric was in the room again. He glanced from one to the other.

"My sister would be glad to speak to you, Miss Shaw." And Elizabeth, without another word, without even bowing to Melchior, swept from the room.

The difficulty in which she found herself placed was great. This detestable Jew's insult did not trouble her; but his knowledge of her secret, his possible betrayal, did. She would not for the world that Alaric Baring should learn the truth; it would vitiate their pleasant position of equality that she should appear as his benefactress, and she clung so strongly to the desire that this one man, at least, should not think of her as rich, until—— There she broke off; she would not put a limit to the length of his ignorance. But had she not registered a mental vow that she would marry no man who asked her, knowing her wealth? It was from opposite causes to those which made her register that vow, though arriving at the same result, that she dreaded this knowledge reaching the proud sensitive American. She knew him well now; she had not a doubt as to how he would behave, even if he grew to care for her—and sometimes she had a curious

belief she could hardly account for, that he *was* beginning to care for her—supposing he discovered she was an heiress. Far from seeking her *then*, he would flee from her. If he had not asked her when he believed her to be poor, he would scorn to do so when he knew her to be rich.

She was greatly exercised all that afternoon as to how she should next meet Melchior—how she should act towards him. The idea of trying to conciliate, or of temporizing with him, was hateful to her. Almost equally so that of appealing to his generosity. Yet, if she declined to have anything further to say to him, she felt sure that he would revenge himself by betraying her to Alaric Baring. It might even lead to an altercation between the two men. What was she to do?

Fate decided the question painfully; but, for the time, decisively. That same evening Hatty had a severe attack of hemorrhage. A doctor was called in, and Elizabeth passed the night by her friend's bedside. For days she lay there utterly prostrate; and all Elizabeth's meals were served to her in Hatty's room. Her brother was, of course, useless. He came in and out, looking sternly anxious, his hands rammed far down into his pockets, his eyes beneath corrugated brows questioning Elizabeth's, and few words passing between them. She was a famous nurse—no trained one could be better; inaccessible, apparently, to fatigue, full of resource, swift and noiseless in movement, and ever ready to bend down and answer her patient's little fluttering whisper with a hopeful smile. She took occasion to tell Alaric that if he could not look a little less gloomy, he had better keep away.

All question of Elizabeth's leaving Hatty's room to join the table d'hôte being disposed of, a masterly inactivity as regarded Melchior seemed the wisest course to pursue. She meditated more than once, in the course of that week, writing to him; but the difficulty of composing such a letter as, without offending, should silence him, withheld her. The portrait, Alaric told her, would in a couple more sittings be complete, as far as Melchior was concerned. His presence, which grated on the American more than ever now, could be dispensed with, for some finishing touches to the dress. Sore troubled at heart for his sister, whose true condition he now for the first time realized, he felt ill disposed to listen to this Israelite's narration of his exploits on the Bourse, his successes with fair ladies, and the advances that were made to him on all sides.

"Take my word for it, Mr. Baring, every woman has her price," he said one day.

"I quite agree with you. Only, fortunately, it is often one that is not to be paid in gold," was the reply.

It must not be supposed that this man, who, thanks to his acute brain, and his want of principle, combined with an extraordinary run of "luck," had generally succeeded in obtaining most things for which he had striven, would sit down patiently under the reverse with which Miss Baring's illness threatened the plot that had relieved the monotony of gambling for him in his little holiday at Monte Carlo. As the week wore on, and Elizabeth did not appear at breakfast, he became indignant. He had been cheated of the object he had had in view in coming here. And the worst of it was, he could not proclaim his

indignation to the pale, red-bearded man opposite, palette in hand, silently piercing him with those steel-grey eyes under the corrugated brows. He could look for no sympathy or help there.

Yet something he was resolved to do, the day before his last sitting, and only two before his departure for Paris. He would see her, *coûte que coûte*. He had not yet made up his mind exactly what he would say to her; but his proposals should be generous—even extravagant, if stimulated by difficulty. Nay, if the worse came to the worst, he thought he would propose marriage; for was he not genuinely "in love"? And, being so unused to opposition, even this last desperate resource might be preferable to utter failure. How should he obtain an interview? He argued thus. It was impossible that she should remain the whole day long in that sick-room, without exercise, sunshine, fresh air. He slipped a napoleon into the head-waiter's hand, and in reply to his inquiries learnt that for the last three or four days the English young lady on the third floor had walked out alone rather late in the afternoon, and had always taken the same direction, —up the hill towards the Italian frontier. He did not remain to breakfast that morning, greatly to Alaric's relief, but returned to Mentone some hours later, and after interviewing his friend the waiter, whom he had appointed to meet him, and learning that the English young lady had already started for her usual walk up the hill, he hastened to follow her.

CHAPTER IV.

She was standing at a turn in the road, where the eye swept a wider range of sapphire-coloured sea, which followed with its narrow white fringe the indentations of the Italian coast. To the right, the sun had already disappeared behind the mountain; but the little town was still backed by a pale, unclouded sky, suffused with gold, against which the piled-up houses stood out in purple-brown relief. This was a view of which Elizabeth never tired. Here it seemed as if she were above and beyond the cares that beset her at the hotel lying there below. The infinite expanse of sea and sky brought a calm with it which entered into her soul. She was unhappy. She had many reasons for being so; but each afternoon of late she had found it restful to come here, and, as it were, release her mind from the bandages of restraint so tightly swathed around her thoughts in the presence of Hatty and her brother.

She did not doubt but that the dear little woman, whom she had grown to love like a sister, was dying. It might be very soon, it might be a little later; but the end could not be far off. What should she do then? Where should she go—feeling, as she would, so much

more desolate even than she did when she fled from England? Return to Madame Martineau's? Take up the old superficial life again, with Morin and Doucet and Madame de Belcour? She had borne with it six months ago. There was a time when, perhaps, it had even amused her; but now, with a sore heart—no, she could not go back. *He* would never go; of that she felt very sure. He had always hated the pension. It was only for Hatty's sake, to whom it offered more comforts than she could have had in a lodging, that he had endured it for so many months. And now the poor solitary fellow would go and live, up *au cinquième*, somewhere in the Quartier Latin, and dine at dreadful restaurants, and, shunning the rowdy lot about him, pass friendless evenings!

Perhaps, for the first time, she fully, frankly realized the place that Alaric Baring had got to fill in her life. Had she not been startled by the conviction that a crisis was at hand, things might have slid on some time longer in the tranquil routine of daily existence without this self-examination. For some weeks past she had known that his influence was growing stronger and stronger; she had known that her feeling for him was altogether different and apart from that with which she regarded all other men; but she had not seen clearly, as she now did, that if they were to be parted for ever, life would never be the same to her again. The secret should die with her, unguessed by any one, unless he came to her with some like acknowledgment. Ah! would he ever come?

Her heart, in the golden silence, had gone down to the

deep well-heads of life, and was drawing up waters wherewith to assuage, if possible, that crying thirst which the shallow brooks and noisy runlets she had known could never do, when she heard a rapid step approaching on the road, and turned, half-dreaming still, to find Melchior close to her.

Her eyes, had he read them aright, would have told him how she resented the intrusion. She had thought but little of the man since Hatty's attack. She knew his sittings were nearly over, and that business called him back to Paris the end of the week. As she meant to avoid seeing him again, she hoped this disagreeable episode was over, and that she should hear no more of Monsieur Melchior. But now, here he was, and she felt that some definite line of conduct must be adopted to stave off the danger that was at hand. Her wits, though unpleasantly startled, were not disconcerted. She knew it was needful that she should have them all at her command.

"Good evening, mademoiselle," he began airily, taking a cigar from his red lips, and showing his brilliant teeth. "We have not met for many days, and I was anxious to see you before I return to Paris."

"You are leaving so soon, monsieur?" she said.

"The day after to-morrow."

She turned, and began leisurely to descend the hill. He continued—

"Now, though our acquaintance has been a short one, I want you to know that you have made a very deep impression on my heart, an impression that will not be effaced by absence. You have in me, mademoiselle, an

admirer who is ready to make any sacrifice in order to win your smiles."

He paused a moment, but she did not speak. The colour rose in her face. She quickened her pace a little, but so little as to be scarcely perceptible.

"You will not leave your sick friend at present? Well, whenever you like it, only say the word, and I will make arrangements for your joining me in Paris, where I can promise you as good an establishment and as handsome a turn-out as are to be seen there. You shall have fifty thousand francs a year for your dress, and if you want to buy another picture of Baring's——"

He laughed, and before he finished his sentence, she said, in a voice she tried to make steady and passionless—

"I understand this to be an offer of marriage, monsieur? It is most flattering. As you know, you *can* know absolutely nothing about me. It happens to be the fourth offer I have had within seven months. I have refused them all. I shall never marry a man whom I do not know well."

He was dumfounded. What did the girl mean? She had snatched the last card out of his hand—the card he had certainly not meant to play so soon—and had, so to speak, tossed it in his face.

"Do you realize all that you reject?" he at last stammered out, with a grin. "My hotel is the finest on the Boulevard Haussmann. I have more than two million of francs yearly."

"If you had a million a minute," she again interrupted, and this time quite calmly, "I should not marry you unless I loved you, Monsieur Melchior. To love a person

one requires to know him some time. It is less than a fortnight, monsieur, since I first saw you."

"Pardon me," he remarked with a sneer. "You forget. We met in Jacob's shop, when you commissioned him to buy Baring's picture."

It all flashed upon her. This, then, was how he had possessed himself of her secret.

"Indeed?" she said, after a moment's pause, which she employed in reflecting how she could continue to fence with this dangerous adversary without exasperating him. "You will hardly call that an acquaintance, however. It reminds me that you said just now you were willing to make any sacrifice I might ask. May I claim one—a very small one—at your hands? It is that you will be silent—absolutely silent—as to that transaction."

He laughed aloud, and, at the same time, threw away the end of his cigar.

"As I said the other day, it is nice to have a secret with you. But who supplies you with money? Tell me that."

"I have some means of my own—more than Mr. Baring or his sister believe. If I choose to live as I do, that is my own affair. I have my own reasons for wishing to remain obscure, unknown, to all appearance poor. Now that I have told you the simple truth, you will understand that I had no need *to get* the money from any one."

"This, then, is the reason you reject my offer—because you have money of your own?"

"It is not *the* reason. The reason is what I have told you. But it prevents there being any merit in my doing

so, which I suppose some people would say there was, were I a half-starving girl."

"You are an extraordinary one, at all events. I never met a woman like you."

"Perhaps you will believe better of me now, monsieur, than you have done," she said, turning her dark eyes steadily upon him.

"Have I not paid you the greatest compliment a man can pay a woman?" he cried, extending his hands dramatically.

"Hardly; but let that pass. I ask not for a compliment, but a kindness—the 'sacrifice,' in short, you offered to make for me just now. I ask you to refrain from speaking of me or my concerns to any one."

"Oh, come, I can't promise that. Why, I can't find out if what you tell me is true, if I don't inquire."

She looked at him with ineffable scorn.

"You doubt my word, then? That is not complimentary, at all events."

"Oh!" he laughed, "I should not think the worse of you if you lied to me about your intimate affairs. All women do."

"Women of honour do not, any more than men. And let me tell you, I shall never look on any man as my friend, in whose honour I have not implicit trust."

"I am not a bad friend to have, mademoiselle. My purse shall ever be at your service."

"I don't want your purse. I want your reticence."

He hummed an *opéra-bouffe* air; then suddenly, "And you offer nothing in return? You do not even hold out any hope?"

She replied, with a heightened colour, "Yes, I hold out the hope of thinking better of you—as you shall behave by me in this matter."

On the handsome face, to her so much more unpleasant than ugliness, there again glittered that smile devoid of all heart-warmth, in which eyes and teeth seemed to flash simultaneously a cold brilliant light, and die out, leaving the countenance darker than before. They had reached a flight of steps which led down by a short cut into the hotel garden.

"I am going back to my sick friend," she said, "so I will wish you good-bye here, monsieur."

"And I shall not see you again, mademoiselle?"

"Probably not. I seldom leave my friend's room."

"This, then, is 'farewell,' till I see you in Paris?"

"Yes. It is farewell, monsieur."

"You will shake hands with me?"

She extended a frigid hand, and he grasped it, held it for a moment, and then raising his hat with a flourish, turned and walked rapidly down the road, while she slowly descended the steps to the left.

Melchior was a vain man, but he was no fool. He knew that if what she said as to having means of her own was true, then his chances of success with her were greatly reduced. His wealth was an all-potent argument to the impecunious; it would lose some of its weight when applied to one with a competence. And then he was going away! She would no longer be under the spell of his personal charm. He felt decidedly less sanguine when he descended than when he had mounted the hill.

Elizabeth, on her part, was sore perplexed.

Had she acted wisely? Was there any other course she could have pursued towards this man? In one respect she was now even more in his power than before. But she did not see how she could have done otherwise than tell him the truth—or, at least, some portion of the truth—in order to prevent his betraying her secret, if possible.

Meantime, Alaric, after working as long as the fading daylight would allow, had strolled into the hotel garden with his pipe, and was wandering up and down the narrow paths, spotted here and there with fallen oranges, and fragrant with their borders of violets, when his eyes lighted on two figures coming down the road above him, and as yet some distance off. He stood still, amazed. They approached the top of the steps. He could scarcely believe his eyes. Elizabeth Shaw, who had expressed such contempt for Melchior, was walking alone with him, and at parting gave him her hand. Had they met by a preconcerted plan? It really looked like it, for he knew Melchior had returned to Monte Carlo that morning. It was incredible that she liked this man; but what on earth could she have to say to him? Alaric had no right to inquire—no right to allude to what he had seen; he was neither of a jealous nor a suspicious temperament. To be suspicious of *her*—in whom he had now such absolute trust—to be jealous of *him*, a man whom he so despised, it was impossible. After all, it would probably be explained in a few words by Elizabeth. But he would not appear to be spying her steps, and did not go forward to join her.

When they did meet, half an hour later, in Hatty's room—she was lying on the sofa, and better able to talk to-night—he purposely gave Elizabeth an opening by mentioning Melchior's departure the following evening for Paris.

"He wants me to paint a frieze for his dining-room there."

"Really?" cried Hatty, raising her head from the pillow, with excitement. "I am so glad!"

"I have not decided whether I shall accept the commission. What should you do, in my place, Miss Shaw?"

She had hoped the two men would not meet again after to-morrow for a long time; and now this would inevitably bring them much together. But she could only say, after a moment's hesitation, "I suppose it would depend on whether I cared for the subject proposed."

"Oh! the subject is well enough—'The Abundance of the Earth and of the Sea.' It is the *object* I don't care about."

His sister threw up her hands impatiently. "What nonsense, Ally! Because it is for a dining-room?"

"For *his* dining-room. He wants it to be a fresco. That means my being in his house for weeks—perhaps months."

"Well? What then? He will be at his business all day. You will probably never see him from one week's end to the other. Such an offer as this does not come to an artist every day. And you who so often say——"

"I know. Don't get excited, Hatty. I ought to be glad to get the order; but, somehow, I am not. I suppose I must give him an answer to-morrow."

Still Elizabeth did not mention having met Melchior that evening. It certainly was very odd. He felt worried about it—more worried than he knew he had any right to be.

When he left the room a little later, Hatty said, screwing up her short-sighted eyes at her friend, "How he has got to hate this Jewish Mecænas! It is a pity."

"It is a pity," echoed Elizabeth, but without conviction in her tone.

"I am persuaded I know the reason."

"Do you?"

"Yes, Lizzie. It is because he thinks the man admires you."

Elizabeth tried to laugh; but the laugh sounded very hollow to her sharp-eared listener.

"I can't fancy a worse reason. Your mind, dear little Hatty, runs riot, since you have been shut up so long. The 'Jewish Mecænas,' as you call him, is a contemptible creature, and your brother knows it. That is the long and the short of his dislike."

Then she began to talk of the sunset, and Hatty wisely refrained from returning to a subject which she saw was distasteful to her friend.

Melchior came to his sitting the next morning, ready primed. He was resolved to learn one thing before he returned to Paris, and he could only learn it from Baring. He talked a great deal, and upon indifferent matters for some time. At last, as the sitting drew near its close—

"Have you known Miss Shaw long?" he suddenly asked.

"Five months," replied the artist, with a resolute touch of his brush on the canvas, and without looking up.

"Will she ever become an artist—a *real* artist?"

"That depends on how she works."

"You do not think much of her at present, then?"

"She is but a beginner."

"She is sure to get on"—here he laughed—"on account of her looks. Perhaps not positively handsome, but very 'fetching'—eh?"

The painter frowned. "Is that the reason you bought her picture?"

"Of course. I seldom buy a woman's work for any other reason."

"I think it a very bad one.

"Bah! you can't humbug me, Baring. You would not take such an interest in the girl, if she were a fright. Come, now, what is her history? You may as well tell me." Here he looked mockingly at the painter, with half-closed eyes. "Do you really think, now, that she is so very poor?"

"I know nothing of her history or of her finances. She is a young lady whom I respect greatly. She is my sister's friend; but her affairs do not concern me."

"Don't they?" Again that evil smile crossed the Jew's face. "Some people might say they concerned you very much. Vous faites l'innocent, mon cher. It won't do with me."

Baring looked up. His cheek was flushed, and his steel-grey eyes flashed, as they crossed swords with Melchior's.

"I do not understand what you mean, Monsieur Melchior: but there are subjects upon which I permit no

man to joke, or to use innuendoes, with me. To every *gentleman*, a lady's name is sacred."

This was the thrust most calculated to irritate his antagonist.

"Bah!" he said, with ill-humour, "it isn't necessary to be blind to a gentleman, I suppose?"

"It is necessary to be dumb."

"That is as much as an acknowledgment that there is something to conceal. You are very deep, Baring; you know much more than you choose to say."

"If I did know much more, I should certainly not say it. I do not choose to discuss Miss Shaw and her affairs with any one."

"You are quite right," sneered Melchior. "When you have got hold of a good thing, keep it. Who supplies her with money? You don't inquire. You take the goods the gods send you, and ask no questions. The girl is *not* a poor artist. She has money—and you know it."

"Your tone, Monsieur Melchior, is offensive," said the painter, sternly. He laid down his palette, and walked deliberately across to where the other was seated. "What do you mean to insinuate?—that Miss Shaw is helping to support me and my sister?"

"In one sense, she certainly is, since it was she who bought your picture from Jacob."

He had not meant to say this—at all events, at present; but the American's tone of superiority, and the impossibility of learning anything from him, had exasperated the Jew past endurance. The effect of his words on Alaric Baring was curious. He turned white; he could not speak for a moment or two.

"What are you driving at, monsieur? What is your object in inventing a story like this?"

"It is no invention. If you did not know it, perhaps you guessed it; only you choose conveniently to shut your eyes."

"Can you prove the truth of what you say?" asked the other sharply, and heedless of the latter allegation.

"I was in the shop at the time. Jacob told me all about it when she had gone out."

"*You?* You actually saw her there?"

"Certainly I did—and she is quite aware of the fact."

It flashed upon Alaric at once that this might be the explanation of their meeting the previous evening.

"She wishes to keep her secret, I imagine—and you have threatened to betray it to me?"

"No; I did not threaten. She wanted me to promise, and I wouldn't do that, for I was determined to find out the truth. I begin to think now that it *is* news to you. Well, you need not let out I told you. But where does she get the money? Has she really means of her own? Is there not some—some other man in it?"

The painter turned sharply away. He took three or four rapid strides up and down the room. He knew that the Jew, blackguard as he was, had not lied. He also knew that his own position, from which there was no escape, was one of bitter humiliation. Men of the stamp of Melchior—nay, perhaps many better than he—would always believe that he, Alaric Baring, had knowingly allowed his sister's friend to sacrifice some portion of her small capital in the purchase of his picture. Oh, why had she done this thing? That slender fabric of

hope and ambition which he had been building of late was suddenly swept down. Nothing could ever again be as it had been between them.

As to Melchior's vile insinuation, it was only when he repeated the question that Baring saw he must reply, and resist the inclination to punch his sitter's head.

"Miss Shaw's character is beyond all suspicion—if that is what you mean, monsieur. Wherever this money comes from, I will put my hand into the fire for it, it comes to her honourably, straightforwardly. Your information is a great shock to me. I cannot disbelieve you; but the only explanation of it I can give is that she is romantic in her friendships, and has made the great mistake of wishing to help my sister by—by this unfortunate means. No one can regret it more than I—no one can regret it as much. If you choose to believe that I knew of this—that I accepted this sacrifice—you must. It does not much matter. All that matters is that no discreditable suspicion should attach to her name."

"I have learnt what I wanted to know," said the other, rising. "Under that cold exterior of yours you love this girl—you care for her in a way that *I* shall never care for any woman. Whether she cares for you I am not so sure. It may be only 'romantic friendship'"—here he laughed—"as you call it. If so, well. I may have something more to say to you by-and-by. At present I have no choice but to leave the field to you. Make your running while you can. Je ne vous en veux pas—'All is fair in love and war.'"

"No! What you have done is neither fair nor honourable. You have surprised a secret, and betrayed it. You

have taken the surest way—if that was your object—of creating an impassable gulf between me and a lady for whom I have the greatest—friendship and regard. Whatever you may choose to believe, no word of love has ever passed my lips to her—and assuredly now none ever will. But if I imitated your example, and betrayed you, Monsieur Melchior, be assured her contempt for you would be equal to my own!"

His voice shook with suppressed rage. He turned his back on his visitor, and walked to the window. Melchior was, for the first time, impressed. He had looked on this as little more than a duel of wits, in which he had succeeded in wrenching the rapier from his antagonist. He now saw that what he thought was a scratch, not worth serious concern, was, in fact, a mortal wound. He was surprised; he had even a tinge of compunction. It was so odd that a man should feel in that sort of way! Instead of gratified vanity, he had aroused a sensitive pride past the Jew's comprehension. He did not know how to deal with a factor so unlooked-for in any human computation. Not that it signified much to him. He was too clever to suppose that anything he could do now could alter the position of affairs as regarded himself. The girl was not to be won, even as a wife, by money. Let the painter say what he would, he loved her—that was clear to Melchior; but if compassion was the only sentiment that inspired her, and that hereafter her funds, from whatever source, ran short, the Jew felt there was yet a possibility that she might look to him.

He turned over these things in his mind as he arranged his cravat at the glass, and slowly put on his *gants de*

Suède, which he buttoned carefully. Then, as he drew out a cheque, already signed and filled in, from a gorgeous pocket-book, he said—

"Here is my debt to you. As soon as the portrait is dry, have it packed and sent to me. It shall be exhibited at the Champs de Mars. And about the frieze? I conclude you accept."

Baring swung himself round from the window, against which his head was pressed, and showed a pale, set face.

"Your cheque—for work done—I have no right to refuse," he said; "your commission I do."

"That is not business, Baring. It is foolish to quarrel with your bread-and-butter on this account. We both like the same girl. Well, keep your affaires du cœur and your business transactions separate. Don't let them interfere with each other."

"Monsieur Melchior, I have painted your portrait, and you have paid me. We have nothing further to do with each other. Our acquaintance from this hour ends."

The patron of art raised his eyebrows superciliously, and his red lips curled.

"It is unwise for a man in your position to speak thus to a man in mine, Baring. But, since you will have it so, good morning."

He put on his soft grey hat deliberately as he spoke, and took up his white umbrella. Baring opened the door for him, and bowed. The Jew passed out.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTMAS had come and gone at Farley, without event of importance to the outward eye. William Shaw was feeble; it was easy to predicate, as his neighbours did, that he would not survive another attack such as he had had in the autumn. Mrs. Shaw certainly was more subdued—did not hunt this winter, and had not appeared at the great county ball. This was noticed with approval, and attributed partly to her husband's failing health, partly to the grief and disappointment consequent upon her niece's behaviour. People compared notes, and found they had all thought her a very odd girl. No one had ever quite succeeded in "making her out;" but it had never been suspected that she would prove so ungrateful to her devoted uncle and aunt. For, of course, the fiction of her staying with friends could not be kept up all these months against the persistent industry to discover where that was. It came at last to being "not quite sure exactly where she is—she so seldom writes." And then, of course, there could no longer be a doubt; she had absconded, and Heaven only knew where she had gone. Certainly Mr. and Mrs. Shaw did not.

The handsome hero of this inexplicable scandal naturally

came in for a large share of female sympathy, until, in September, the *Morning Post* announced his engagement to Miss Krupp. Even then there were those who, encouraged in that belief by Mrs. Shaw's hints, held that he had only been driven to this step through "pique." This word held its own bravely against all—or nearly all comers. The good pastor tried to assail it; but, alas! he was but poorly armed, being forced to confess that the unhappy girl had herself confessed to him her engagement to Wybrowe, with every outward manifestation of happiness. He shook his head and sighed; he could not understand it, nor could any one else. But though the view taken of Elizabeth's turpitude varied, according to the charity of the speaker, the voice of public opinion was unanimously against her, and is so to the present day. In letting the truth be known, I conceive that I am but doing a simple act of justice, though there are those still living who will not thank me.

Wybrowe came to Farley, and went away, and came again about the New Year. People said how kind it was of the Shaws to have him; some wondered at his having the courage to return to the scene where his affections had been so wounded. He wore the same superfine air of lofty indifference which he had ever worn, and which was now thought to be the mask of a bleeding heart. What with the lions in Africa, and Elizabeth's shameful treatment of him, there is no doubt that at this time he inspired more admiration of a certain kind than any drawing-room hero going.

In the beginning of January something happened. What it was exactly has never been known, or, if known,

never divulged. But Joshua Twisden one morning received a telegram, couched in these terms—

"*Destroy second will at once. Bring first will with you to Farley to-day, if possible; if not, to-morrow.*—WILLIAM SHAW."

The old solicitor was fairly well again now; George was with him, and hard at work. He could leave all in his hands for a day or two; so after obeying the first injunction laid upon him in the telegram—which he did with great satisfaction—he started for Farley by an afternoon train, wiring the hour of his arrival at the station. There the Shaw brougham met him. On entering the house at Farley, his black bag in his hand, the first person he saw was Mrs. Shaw. She was standing in the hall, evidently waiting for him. The pretty little woman seemed strangely perturbed, all her brilliant chirpiness gone, a poor, draggled little bird, scared and songless.

"Did he telegraph to you?" she began at once. "I did not know——"

"Yes, Mr. Shaw telegraphed. Is he very ill?"

"I—I am afraid he is. I hardly think he is quite right in his mind; he has such strange fancies."

"Is the doctor now with him?"

"No; he was here this morning—is coming again to-night. He said there was nothing to be done but keep him very quiet. You—you will not let him talk much about business, Mr. Twisden?"

"I conclude he sent for me for that purpose," returned the old gentleman, "and I cannot prevent his doing so."

"Still, if his mind is not in its natural state, any excitement may—— Try and quiet him, will you? He

may say, he may be prompted to *do*, things which—which——"

Her disconnected sentences, poured out in a flurried manner, were stopped short by the descent of Mr. Shaw's valet. He came rapidly down the stairs, to request that Mr. Twisden would not delay in going to his master, who had heard the brougham drive up. He brought a message, furthermore, to Mrs. Shaw, desiring that neither the doctor nor any one else should enter his room until Mr. Twisden had departed.

He lay, white and weak, propped up by pillows, his eyes riveted on the door by which the lawyer entered. The sick man motioned his valet to withdraw. Twisden approached and took his hand. A table, with pens, ink, and paper, were beside the bed, and an easy-chair, to which Shaw pointed.

"I've sent for you—in a hurry, Twisden," he breathed heavily between his phrases, which were broken, "because I've not long to be here, and—I want to alter things a bit. They're changed. Yes, all's changed, Twisden—from what it was—a while back. And yet I don't know—as they *are* changed—only——"

"Do not exhaust yourself unnecessarily by talking, my dear Shaw," cut in the old lawyer. "Tell me definitely and succinctly what you want. I am here to obey your instructions. I have already done so as regarded destroying your second will. The first will I have here in this bag."

"The second's destroyed? That's good, anyway." He gave a sigh of relief. "If I had listened to you, Twisden, I shouldn't ha' made it. Well, I know now why the

poor lass left me. 'Twas out o' consideration for me she wouldn't speak; and I ain't goin' to tell you, Twisden. No, I'm goin' to die, and it ain't worth while. But I want—I want——"

Here his face grew redder, and the veins in his forehead swelled; his voice also shook; and the old lawyer leaning forward, said—

"I think I understand. You want your niece to inherit all you possess, after your wife's death?"

"No! After *my* death!" he cried. "Don't ye make—a mistake—after *my* death. Take out the will, and put in a—what d'ye call it?—just to upset what you wrote in before—about letting my wife—enjoy all the money—for her life. It ain't necessary. Her jointure's about one-third of the income—that's good enough—for a single woman; and—and it ain't enough—to tempt a blackguard."

"Do you not wish to leave anything at Mrs. Shaw's disposal?"

He hesitated a moment. "No—not worth while—only tempting blackguards. She has got this house for her life, and nearly three thousand a year. It's Shaw money. I don't want a penny of it to go—to blackguards; it shall come back to Elizabeth."

He said this, in one form or another, over and over again. Then Twisden brought out the will from his black bag, and the next quarter of an hour was employed in reading it carefully over to the dying man, and seeing that he fully understood its provisions. He appended the codicil which gave to Elizabeth the whole of her uncle's property, at his demise, subject to a life-interest

in the Farley estate, together with the jointure settled upon Mrs. Shaw, on her marriage.

The butler and valet were then summoned to witness their master's signature, which was clear enough, though written with a trembling hand. To this codicil he wished some explanation to be appended, the actual wording of which, after a little deliberation, was formulated by Twisden thus—

"I make this alteration in my will, being at the time of sound mind, in order that my wife may not fall a victim to designing persons, at my death; a precaution I am sure she will understand."

After that he seemed more tranquil, partly, no doubt, from exhaustion.

"You'll stay the night here, Twisden?" he asked feebly.

"As my business here is done, I shall be glad to return by the eight-o'clock train. I shall be home by eleven," said the lawyer, locking his bag.

William Shaw touched the bell. "Some dinner for Mr. Twisden—at once—and the brougham round—in time for the eight-o'clock train."

The distinctness of his instructions was especially mentioned afterwards, when the clearness of his brain at the time was called in question. He was told that the doctor had arrived.

"I suppose I must see him. It ain't any use, but I suppose I'd better see him. A few days more—or less; it's hardly worth while——"

"Oh yes, it is," returned the lawyer, as he held out his hand. "While there is life, there is hope. I've been

very bad, nearly gone, myself more than once. And that reminds me. Would you not like to see your niece? Shall I wire, to tell her so?"

"Nay," he said, almost in a whisper. "She wouldn't like to come here. I understand it all now. You'll tell her so—eh, Twisden? You'll tell her that I understood? She is a good lass; I always thought she was a good lass—and—and I'll give a good report of her to her father."

The two old men shook hands. Both knew that it was their last meeting on earth. But the one whose time was not yet come could not regret that the honest, simple-minded man who lay upon his death-bed should be taken from the treachery and deceit by which he had been surrounded for so long, and to which his eyes had now at last been opened.

The parrot talked shrilly to the lawyer while he ate his solitary meal, but his mistress had the grace not to intrude herself upon him. She could do no good now. Whatever had taken place in the bedroom upstairs was past recall. Mr. Twisden would say, virtually, like Pilate, "What I have written, I have written." He saw her for an instant before stepping into the brougham, when she looked wistfully into his face, and made as though she would say something. But the words died on her lips, incapable of utterance before the grave, unpitying politeness of the old lawyer.

Elizabeth received the news of her uncle's death by telegram the very morning of Melchior's last interview with Alaric Baring. She was genuinely grieved to think

that she should never see his kind face again. The last link with the past—the past belonging to her dear father—was snapped. And yet she ought not to grieve that he was at rest, good honest soul!—for ever at rest from the troubles of this wicked world; that he had fallen asleep, in ignorance (as she then believed) of his wife's falsity, and only wounded through *her*—Elizabeth—whom he believed to be ungrateful. Sorely as she felt this, she said bravely to herself that it was better so. But she shed some bitter tears, nevertheless. It was the reopening of an old wound, rather than the infliction of a new one.

That evening was a perturbed one to all the three gathered together in the small upper chamber at Mentone. Elizabeth made no concealment of her sorrow; she had lost the last near relation she had upon earth. But she had another, and more present, cause for depression. She feared, though she could not feel sure, that her secret had been betrayed by Melchior. Alaric had said nothing to his sister, and was resolved that no hint of what he had learnt should escape him, as long as he could not alter his position of indebtedness. But, as is often the case, there was something in his manner—a change imperceptible to the casual observer—which did not elude the vigilant scrutiny of both his companions. Hatty, indeed, did not find it difficult to account for the shade more of softness in his tone, the additionally careworn look upon his dear face. She knew that *he* knew now how very short a time she would be with him. And after that, what then? She prayed, with all the fervour of narrowly restricted affections, that she might join together the

hands of the only two beings she loved on earth, before she left it. But how? The time left her to accomplish this was short. She was not satisfied with the progress things had made. Indeed, for the last few weeks they seemed to have been at a standstill. It is true that she had no fear now of Alaric's misunderstanding Elizabeth; a very strong regard subsisted between them—of that she felt sure. As regarded her brother, she believed it to be something much more than this, but it was provoking that he would not speak openly, even to Hatty, of himself—of his own feelings. Never, since that conversation with her in Paris nearly three months before, had Hatty been able to get him to talk of Elizabeth. If she tried to do so, he changed the conversation instantly.

With her friend it was different. She never showed any disinclination to listen to the praises of poor Hatty's hero, to hear anecdotes of his nobility and self-sacrifice, his trenchant words to the ungodly whom he had morally knocked down, his kindly words to the humble whom he had lifted up; Elizabeth was not afraid to manifest frankly the interest she felt in the brother, when the sister and she were alone. But in his presence something of the daring which had characterized her utterances in the early pension days was gone. To-night, especially, her silence and her watchfulness of Alaric struck Hatty greatly. Her sorrow for her uncle, of which she had spoken quite naturally, might account for the first, but hardly for the second. Alaric, too, said very little. Neither of them seemed completely at ease. And yet Melchior's departure was felt by all to be a relief, though Hatty openly expressed her vexation that his commission

had been refused. She lay upon her sofa, screwing up her short-sighted eyes first at one, and then at the other, trying to make each talk, and trying even more to divine the thoughts of each.

But in the secret watches of the night she made up her mind that the hours left to her were now too few, too precious, to remain longer silent. She would speak to her dear brother to-morrow—speak, as a mother to a son; for it was not to be endured that, when she was gone, these two should drift apart, if happiness was really within reach of both.

CHAPTER VI.

But it was decreed by a Higher Power than Hatty's that a fortnight should pass before she should have that close conversation with her brother which she so passionately desired. Another attack of hemorrhage prostrated her the same day on which she looked to have spoken to him, and after that the doctor interdicted her talking for more than a week. She fretted terribly under the restriction; but even when she began to regain a little strength, Alaric always avoided being left alone with her. Elizabeth's devotion was untiring as ever; the greater part of every day was passed in her sick friend's room, and the subject of anxiety common to the brother and to herself did away with much of the restraint and the watchfulness which, as I have already said, characterized their relations at first, after Melchior's departure.

In the mean time Elizabeth received, officially, the news of her large additional inheritance, by reason of the alteration in her uncle's will. She could not affect to regret that the woman who had so infamously deceived the kind old man, and who had done her best to ruin Elizabeth's own life, should not have it in her power

to enrich her paramour. But she did very honestly grieve that his last hours should have been embittered by the knowledge of his wife's treachery—which the alteration of his will clearly proved him to have obtained. Mr. Twisden's cautiously worded letter did no more than repeat *verbatim* the message her uncle had desired should be transmitted to his niece. It was enough. He had forgiven Elizabeth, for his eyes had been opened. It was a comfort to her to know that his last thought of her was not unkindly, not resentful of her fancied ingratitude. Still, the burthen of more money! She sighed as she thought of it. Uncle William was dead, and with his death the main object of her reclusion, the only valid excuse for leading her present life, was at an end. She did not shut her eyes to the truth. It would be her duty now to return to England, and take up her solitary existence at Whiteburn.

The Paris train had been in about an hour one afternoon—it was some days after Elizabeth had received the above communication — when Alaric walked into his sister's room, and found her alone, lying on a sofa near the window. Under her thin hand there lay an open French book, but she was not reading. Her wasted face was turned towards the last golden gleam of day, over which the twilight was rapidly gathering.

"Are you coming to sit with me a little while, Ally?" she asked. "We are so seldom alone, and I have so much to say to you."

He drew a chair close to her sofa, and sat down.

"We shall not be interrupted for some time, I fancy," he remarked dryly. "Miss Shaw is occupied."

"Is she? I am glad. It is about her I want to talk, dear. My time here now is very short—we both know it, don't we?—and if it were not for you, and for this dear devoted girl, I should be glad to go. As it is, I am unhappy—very unhappy."

She wanted him to ask "Why?" But he was silent. He stroked her thin hand, and looked away. He saw that the explanation he had so long avoided was inevitable.

"Do you know what this book is called?" she said, holding up the yellow-paper-covered volume. "It is called 'À Coté du Bonheur.' I am so afraid that may be your case, Ally. Having happiness, perhaps, within your grasp, that you will let it slip by you—past all recall!"

"Happiness is *not* within my grasp. On the contrary, it is out of reach at present. I won't pretend to misunderstand you, Hatty. Rest satisfied, dear, that if this could be, it should be; but it is impossible."

"Why?"

"You know I told you long ago that I could never marry as long as I was penniless. I am worse than penniless—I am in debt, and to this very girl! Think of that, and then of my asking her to wipe out the debt by marrying me! Dragging her down to my poverty; trading upon her devotion to you, her womanly self-sacrifice, her position here with us, to make her accept a man who has nothing—absolutely nothing to offer her!"

"What do you mean by being in her debt?" Hatty gasped.

"I mean that it was *she* who bought my picture to enable us to have the money to come here. It was noble, it was like her; but it has been a cruel blow to my pride, to

think that we are living on the proceeds of some part of her small fortune. Of course it shall be repaid, every farthing of it, by-and-by. But ask her now to marry me? No."

His sister lay back and closed her eyes for a moment.

"Ally, my belief—my firm belief—is that Elizabeth loves you. You have as good as confessed now that you love her. Let no false pride nor mistaken delicacy come between you. Think, dear, how much poorer you leave her if you rob her of her love, her peace of mind, than she is now by the loss of a few thousand francs!"

"That is all very well," he said decisively; "but it would not be the part of an honourable man to entangle her in an engagement now. I shall never care for any other woman; I shall never marry any other woman. You can believe me, Hatty, because you know I never change. But, though sure of myself, I know she should be left free. She is impulsive, enthusiastic. She did this thing out of love for you. She might accept me now, and repent it later. I must not take advantage of my position as your brother. By-and-by, if I am fortunate, if I can make an independent income, as long as she remains unmarried, I shall not abandon hope. In the mean time, there are others, as you know, in the field."

"You don't mean that dreadful Jew? You can't think she would have *him?*"

"No, she would not. But I am not so clear about that fellow George. Do you know that he has followed her here?"

"Here? Mr. George?"

"He arrived by the last train. As I passed by the salon just now, I looked in. They were there together in close conversation."

"I hate that young man!" said Hatty, viciously. "I always hated him, since Fontainebleau. What on earth does he come here for?"

"Well, I should think it was pretty plain. If he is encouraged to stay, you will acknowledge you were too sanguine—eh? The fellow has youth, social cleverness, high spirits. I am ten years older, and though, I suppose, I have better brains, have no facility for using them in company, and have very little gas in my composition. If she finds me dull——"

"She does not. You were disagreeable to her at one time, but dull—never."

"We are fast friends now; I know it. But she does not guess that she is much more to me than that; and it may be this young fellow touches something in her that I never could touch. Why should I be surprised if it is so? I have no false modesty, Hatty. I know my own worth. But I try to have no delusions—on this subject, especially. I love her with all the strength of my nature. But during the six months I have known her, she has changed so much——"

"Not more than you have," interrupted Hatty. "I mean in manner towards her."

"But I have not played with fire. Elizabeth has. Understand, dear. I don't reproach her. What right have I? But I cannot jump so readily as you do to the conclusion that I have won her heart. You told me yourself you suspected she was recovering from some

bitter disappointment, which made her so on the defensive, when she arrived at Madame Martineau's. Then came the episode of that blackguard Doucet. After that this George, and then followed the lord, who called himself Mr. Elton. He did not stay long, it is true; but there must have been something between them in the past to have encouraged him to come. I do not believe that she has cared for any one of these men; but still, looking dispassionately at all this——"

"Ah! there it is. You ought not to look at it dispassionately. You ought to forget everything in your determination to win this pearl of great price, by speaking to her openly, freely, with all the passion you really feel. What does the past signify? She loves you now, or she does not. When I am dead, she will go back to England, believing you to be cold—insensible. And believing you so, and feeling very lonely, as she will (she told me yesterday how she hated the thought of returning there alone, without a single relation), she will in time, I suppose, do as other women do—marry some man whom she does not, and never will, care for as she does for you!"

Poor Hatty spoke out of the fulness of her heart, vehemently, but spasmodically, gasping for breath at intervals. Her intensity moved him. He raised the thin little hand to his lips.

"Will any one ever love me as beautifully, as unselfishly as you have done, Hatty?" he said, with unusual tenderness. "From boyhood upward you have been my guardian angel, and no one—neither Elizabeth, nor any other woman—sees me with your partial eyes. Rest

satisfied with this—that my love for her has grown upon me, day by day, till it is part of my being. I cannot ask her to marry me now; I have told you why. But if you are right in believing that she really cares for me, she will not quickly turn to another, though I remain silent, and she is free as air."

"I see it is useless arguing with you," murmured Hatty, faintly.

He poured out some medicine from the bottle on the table beside her. Then, to prevent her talking more, he drew the *Journal des Beaux Arts* from his pocket, and began reading aloud.

On Mr. Twisden's return from Farley, George Daintree had asked his uncle boldly for the fortnight of his holiday which he had lost by being recalled at the end of October. The old man felt he could not reasonably refuse. George had been working hard during the intervening months, and devoting himself to his uncle with praiseworthy patience. Though always cheerful and energetic, he had been beginning to lose something of his fresh colour of late. He must certainly be allowed a holiday. And his uncle, who thought the matter well out, decided that he had neither the right, nor the power, to stop his nephew's following Elizabeth, as Mr. Twisden felt sure he would, knowing George's tenacity of purpose. Under these circumstances, there was but one thing to be done. He wrote to Elizabeth, in these terms—

"My nephew, George Daintree, told me some time ago a thing which has troubled me a good deal—namely, that being led accidentally to the pension where you

stayed in Paris, he concealed his identity from you, knowing your wish to remain unknown. This was foolish. I hope you will believe that it was a pure accident that brought him to Madame Martineau's. *I* did not betray your address. He is an excellent young man, and I have a high esteem as well as affection for him. As my possible successor in this firm, I am glad you should know him, but I regret that you should have known him *in this way*. In your relative positions, I consider it unadvisable that, as long as you are alone, and on the Continent, you should be thrown much together. The world might, very naturally, blame me for this. At the same time, I cannot forbid my nephew from finding you out, if he be so minded, and I have reason to suspect that he means to do so, when he takes a run abroad, shortly. The only straightforward course for me is to tell you who 'Mr. George' really is, and strongly to counsel you to discourage an intimacy which may lead to disappointment and estrangement hereafter, when my desire is that you may find in him a wise and trustworthy legal adviser."

This passage in Mr. Twisden's letter, received three days before, had prepared Elizabeth for George Daintree's appearance that afternoon. There was a certain change in her manner, of which he was at once conscious, as she held out her hand.

"So you have found me out *again*, Mr. George Daintree! Why did you not tell me in Paris that you were the nephew of my old friend?"

He had come, meaning to make a clean breast of it—or as clean as was possible under the circumstances;

but for an instant he was taken aback. Then he said, colouring—

"I respected your wish to remain unknown. And as you, for your own reasons, desired to keep 'dark,' I did not see why *I* should not do so. If I had told you who I was, you would have suspected that I had been sent by my uncle as a spy."

"I never suspect those I trust. I trust your uncle implicitly."

"You said when we departed, Miss Shaw, that you trusted *me*. I hope you still do so?"

"Frankly, my trust in you is a little shaken. But I hope to recover it," she added, smiling. "Now that I know you are dear Mr. Twisden's nephew—and he writes most affectionately of you—I am going to believe that you will be his worthy successor some day, and—my friend."

"I shall always be that," he said, eagerly. "But why do you say your trust is shaken? Because I concealed my name? Surely that is not fair. You yourself were in hiding, which comes to the same thing."

"Our positions were not the same, Mr. Daintree," she said, after a moment's hesitation. "I had particular reasons for wishing to be unknown. As to yours—the one you have just given me—it does not strike me as a very good one. You might have left the pension at once, after *accidentally* discovering me, had you been so afraid I should regard you as a 'spy.' After you were gone I learnt something which opened my eyes. But, let us forget the past—forget a little folly on your part, and some, perhaps, on mine. I am quite willing, frankly, to

begin a new score—and never to allude to the old one. Only I think you had better not stay here now. It might —it might be misunderstood."

He looked crestfallen. "I suppose you learnt from Lord Robert that I knew who you were? Did that change all your kindly feeling towards me? You did not discourage my return. I hoped you would let me remain near you for a while. When we parted you said—you would be always glad to—see me."

"And so I shall be, by-and-by, in England. But at present everything is changed with me," she added with a sigh. "Here I am passing my days sorrowfully in a sick-room, and, on every account, I should not wish you to stay here. Do not think me rude—but it is better so."

He was bitterly chagrined; but he would not even now own himself defeated. After a pause he asked—

"When do you expect to be in England, Miss Shaw? My uncle says, now that Mr. William is dead, there are many things on your Whiteburn estate that require your presence to decide what is to be done."

"They must go on as they are for the present. My return depends on my friend's health. She cannot live very long. When she is gone"—there was a break in her voice—"I shall go back there."

"And you will let me know? You will let me come and see you?"

"I shall let your uncle know at once, Mr. Daintree."

He saw it was useless to remain longer. Indeed, she herself rose, and walked to the window. He followed her.

"Say you forgive me."

"Oh yes, I forgive you. Indeed, there is nothing to forgive. I am sorry you took the trouble to come here. That is all."

"I shall obey you, and go away. Some day——"

"We shall meet on friendly terms in England. Good-bye."

He looked wistfully into her face as they shook hands; but there was no softening, no relenting. She was no longer the Elizabeth Shaw of three months ago to him.

And so they parted.

CHAPTER VII.

Snow is a rare event at Mentone; but the night following there was a fall, succeeded by a frost, which kept the red roofs white throughout the next day, and laid over the brown earth in the garden a thin white coverlid, from which the violets, anemones, and here and there a rose, looked up under the drawn sword of an aloe. The gold-red fruit shone yet more brilliantly among the dark orange trees powdered with snow beneath a clear blue sky. The sun shone hotly, but the snow only melted in places. In the shade it was still hard, for the frost showed no sign of giving way, and the wind was icy cold. Invalids coughed and shivered. They murmured that it was not worth while to leave the comforts of home to be frozen up on the Riviera.

But poor Hatty had not left "the comforts of home;" and Hatty never murmured. Only her cough was decidedly worse; the sharp wind pierced through the crevices of doors and windows. Finally she gave in, and returned to bed. Her brother and Elizabeth were a great deal in her room, but she spoke very little. Her thin cheeks were aflame, her dry, hard cough was distressing to listen to; she could not rest, for her mind was as little

at ease as her body. Finally, towards evening, Elizabeth gave her, by the doctor's order, a composing draught, and she fell asleep. Then Elizabeth, whose room was next her friend's, left her, and went down to dinner. Alaric was not there, and she was almost glad of it. The doctor had told them both that day that they must be prepared for the end at any moment. The strong man had gone out to commune with his own heart in solitude. Elizabeth could better endure the amiable commonplaces of the clergyman and his spouse, the purring curiosity of the spinster with the knitting, the gloom of the inexplicable man, than she could have talked to Alaric just then. Her heart was very heavy—heavy with sorrow so complicated that it was difficult to speak to *him*, of all people in the world, of her sense of personal loss in his impending grief

After dinner she went and stood outside the door, in the clear moonlight. It was bitter cold, but the wind had dropped, and, with a shawl over her head, it revived her to feel the sharp snow-laden air against her cheek, after the heated dining-room. The trees stood out as if carved in bronze against the snowy roofs below, and blue heavens, sown with stars, above. The moon was at its full; she could have read a letter by its light. The shadow of every leaf on the interlacing boughs lay black upon the snow, and on the gravel path, which had been swept in front of the door.

Presently she was conscious that, among the motionless shadows, one shadow in the distance moved—that it was drawing near. The figure casting this shadow was not distinctly visible at first, while upon her the moon shone full. But, when he came out from under the trees, she

recognized the tall form of Baring in an Inverness cape. As he drew near he said in a low voice—

"Is she easier now?"

"She is asleep."

"Does the doctor return to-night?"

"Not unless he is sent for."

"There should be a nurse. I must send for one."

"It is not necessary; I am going to sit up with her."

"Again? I cannot allow it," he said, almost gruffly. "You will be falling ill next."

"Oh, I am very strong! I have not been up with her for some nights. Please don't send for a nurse. She would so much rather have me."

"Yes; she would rather have you, but——" He broke off; then, a moment later, "After to-night, there *must* be a trained nurse. I cannot have it said that I allowed you to sacrifice yourself to Hatty. God knows how long this may last!"

"Not very long," she whispered. Then, feeling the tears rising in her eyes, she turned from him, entered the house, and closed the door softly behind her.

When Elizabeth entered Hatty's room, she was still asleep, and remained so for some hours. Alaric came to the door, and a few whispered words passed between him and Elizabeth. He would not go to bed; he would lie down, dressed as he was, that he might be ready to fetch the doctor, in case he should be called in the night. Otherwise he would not return to his sister's room; it was better that she should be left undisturbed. Elizabeth put on her dressing-gown, drew an armchair close to Hatty's

bedside, and, with the shaded lamp behind her, sat down to read—if it were possible. For some time, by a resolute effort, her eye travelled down the page; she turned it, and her eye travelled down another, but she knew not what she read, her thoughts were far away. Finally, she closed the book, and sat motionless, with folded hands, her eyes fixed on the wall opposite, where the circular shadow of the lamp fell, and where, in the corner near the window, a shaft of white moonlight streamed in through the shutters.

How long she had sat there she knew not, when she heard Hatty's voice, weak, but distinct, ask what o'clock it was. She stretched out a feverish hand from the bed at the same time, and laid it on Elizabeth's.

"It is nearly midnight," replied the other, looking at her watch. "You have slept for some hours, dear."

"And I feel—better able to talk—which I want to do, before—before I go, Lizzie. But—give me something to drink; I am so thirsty."

She gave her some lemonade, and propped up the pillow under her head. After a minute's pause, Hatty continued—

"My time now is very short—and I want to say something while I can—something which I have much at heart. You are the only woman Alaric has ever loved—the only woman he will ever marry: I have it from his own mouth."

Elizabeth's cheek flushed, and then grew pale. The eyelids quivered for an instant, but the dark light of the eyes themselves burned steadily on the face of the dying woman. She continued—

"From a mistaken sense of honour and duty, he will not tell you so now. It may be years before he does."

"Why?"

"He knows you have some money, Lizzie—it may not be much, but you have something. He has nothing. The little we had was lost, you know——"

"Dear Hatty, what can *I* do?"

"Do? Ah! you have already done too much, dear! That is half the trouble. But—but—say that you care for him! Only tell me that, dear!—only say that you will wait till he can—put by a little money—and then——"

She stopped short, panting. But her eyes watched the struggle that was shown in the dark tender face that bent over her, for full a minute, before the girl said, huskily—

"If he does not speak now, Hatty, he will not by-and-by."

"You doubt him? You think he will change?"

"No; but the pride that keeps him silent now, will keep him doubly silent then. He knows me as a girl, trying to become an artist, and with a little money. Therefore he will not ask me to marry him. Dear Hatty, if he knew the truth—— I will tell you the truth, and you shall judge. I am a rich woman. It could not be concealed from him much longer. My wealth has brought me nothing but misery—misery and shame. Therefore I fled from it. I wanted to live among people who didn't know I was rich, where I should not be surrounded by falsehood and deception. My reward has been to find you—and *him*. Yes, dear, I confess it!—in this solemn hour I may confess it to you, for I say it as I would on

my knees before God. My pride through life, my comfort when I die, will be to think that I won the heart of so noble a man as your brother. And yet, unless he speaks now, I know that I shall never be his wife."

She flung herself down beside the bed, and buried her head in her hands. Her self-control, for once, had given way. Hatty, startled, with all her thoughts in confusion at what she had just heard, could only lie back on her pillow, panting for breath.

After a few minutes she gasped faintly, "You are right. Poor Ally! Unless he speaks now. I am going from him—going——"

Elizabeth started to her feet. Something in the voice struck her painfully. She brushed the hot tears away, and, looking into Hatty's face, saw that a grey colour had overspread it. The eyes alone retained any vitality. She poured down the dying woman's throat some drops which the doctor had said were to be given in emergency; then went swiftly out, and knocked at Alaric's door.

He sprang from the bed on which he had thrown himself dressed, and opened the door.

"She is worse! Will you come to her?"

"Have you sent for the doctor?" he asked quickly, as he shut the door behind him.

She shook her head. "It is past that—but I will send for him. The end is very near. Go in alone. She may like to see you alone. I will follow presently."

She ran down three flights of stairs, and woke the porter asleep on the bench. After she had sent off a messenger, she mounted the stairs again, slowly, and lingered in the passage, uncertain whether she ought to

disturb them. At last, not without some misgiving, she opened the door gently, and hesitated in the doorway for a moment, before she entered.

He was standing erect beside her bed. Two wasted hands were in his strong hands, and the light of the lamp fell on them. The pale, sharp-outlined face, red beard, and close-cut hair were in shadow. He turned his head at the sound of the opening door.

"She wants you," he said, in a low voice.

Elizabeth came to him: they stood side by side. The dying woman dropped one of his hands, and took Elizabeth's. Her voice was very faint, but she spoke distinctly.

"Ally—you have told me—you will never love any other woman than this. Is it true?"

"It is. Let that satisfy you, my dear," he replied, in a low, choked voice.

"And you,—Lizzie—do you love my brother? If so, let me see you—clasp hands—before I go. Then—I shall die—happy."

Before she could answer, he broke in, with a voice that struggled to be calm—

"No—no!—It is not right, at such a moment as this, to extract a promise from Elizabeth. No! Hatty. Let it be enough for you, dear, to know that hereafter, whether she and I are parted or not——"

"If we are parted," interrupted Elizabeth, with a sudden audacity, born of excitement—"it shall not be my fault. I love him, and I ask him now to be my husband. I ask him to promise me this, by vows as binding as any man ever took. And I declare to you

now, dearest Hatty, before God, that if he will not have me, no man ever shall."

Then the resolute man was shaken in his inmost soul, and with a great sob he opened his arms, and she fell into them. A glory, as of perfect peace, shone on the devoted sister's face. They both knelt down, and with her last breath she blessed them.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEVEN years have passed since that night, when Elizabeth's story was virtually ended. All that followed came in natural sequence; and were this simply a narrative, cunningly worked up to a climax, I should not feel tempted to add another word. But in telling the story of Elizabeth Shaw's girlhood, the gradual formation of a strong character will, perhaps, to some, be of greater interest than the actual events which seem to have moulded it. How her husband's individuality acted on her—how, indeed, they mentally acted on each other—some may care to know. I have tried to show how the blunt, warm-hearted girl of eighteen mistook gratified vanity and susceptibility to a man's physical attraction for love; how, in the bitterness of revolt and indignation, she assumed a defiant, almost reckless attitude towards the world at large; and how, finally, the slow growth of a genuine passion subjugated a nature which might otherwise have become hard. The man who wrought this change was masterful, might even be thought arrogant, by many; but his very defects were such as suited a woman of Elizabeth's fibre; while the nobility of his character, unsoiled by any stain of worldly-mindedness,

commanded that respect without which the girl, after her first cruel experience, would never have given her whole heart. She did give it, unreservedly: and therein lay the strength of this union; though I think I hear a reader, at the close of the last chapter, exclaim, "Could two such dominant natures ever be happy together?"

The ordinary man of the world will be incredulous, but it is none the less true, it was a shock to Alaric Baring to learn that the woman he loved—the woman he had pledged himself to marry—possessed a large fortune. Had he been an unsuccessful painter, the sense of dependence on his rich wife would, without doubt, have materially clouded his happiness. But his talent was at once recognized, and though the public shied a little at first at such bold impressionism, connoisseurs, whose dictum was final, declared that no man living could seize character and reproduce it on canvas as did this vigorous American. Then it became the fashion for young men and old to flock to his studio in Melbury Road, together with such wise women as did not wish to be flattered.

But this was only during certain months of the year. At Whiteburn, where Elizabeth and he passed the greater part of the winter, Elizabeth built a large painting-room for her husband; and there it was he produced the more ambitious, imaginative work which has been so extravagantly praised and so severely criticized.

It was characteristic of Elizabeth that, with all her passionate devotion to her husband, which increased rather than diminished with years, she never succeeded in always seeing, nor did she pretend always to see, with

his eyes. She gloried in his success; her cheek was aflame at praise, rising occasionally to enthusiasm, from the lips of men whose judgment was held paramount in the realm of Art. But there were times when she herself remained silent—times when those who knew her as well as I did saw clearly that she did not wholly like the picture on the easel before us. She was too honest to pretend, and affection did not render her blind. She was glad that others did not see it as she saw it; she was glad when they spoke comfortable words; and she herself held her peace. But I am inclined to think that, in strict privacy, she occasionally pointed out, and solicited the modification of, some needless insistence on ugliness; and, what is more remarkable, that now and again he yielded to the solicitation. I saw limbs, laboriously unfinished, grow firm and tangible; fingers that looked ready, like Daphne's, to sprout into twigs, become prehensive; the one ill-disposed feature in a sitter's face lose something of its aggressiveness. And I guessed how these changes had been brought to pass.

Alaric had not wasted the firstfruits of his manhood on other women; none had ever gained any real ascendency over him, and, in her own field, Elizabeth's was complete. That it affected his art, except on rare occasions, I am not prepared to say; but that it softened his manners, and widened his sympathies in the world at large, I feel sure. At Whiteburn, though the management of the estate was entirely in Elizabeth's own hands, he played the part of host with an urbanity which would have astonished those who had only seen him at Madame Martineau's; and which won over most of the neighbours,

naturally exasperated as they were at the waste of their great heiress on an American painter.

He rides well; and this was a great and unexpected merit in the eyes of the men. Occasionally he and his wife go out with the hounds; but more often they mount their horses together, either very early or very late in the day, when the light is waning in the studio. Her life is a very full one. The care of her children—three have been born to her in those seven years; the direction of affairs on her property; the active interest she takes in the welfare of the town, and especially of the "hands" employed in her late father's factory, occupy much of her time at Whiteburn. She has little left for painting; but you may occasionally find her standing at an easel in a corner of the big atelier, and the master comes, as he did more than seven years ago, and criticizes her work.

It is a hospitable house; and yet they are very often alone together, which Baring retains enough of his old nature greatly to prefer to a party, however congenial its elements. Among the yearly guests, however, a man never fails, whom Alaric has grown to regard with real friendship, Lord Robert Elton. His portrait of the Conservative Member was one of Baring's most successful works; the ugliness, indeed, unmitigated, but the likeness speaking. Elizabeth, with a woman's match-making proclivity, is always trying to find a suitable wife for the man who has remained one of her warmest friends. But as yet she has not succeeded in persuading him to offer his hand to any of the attractive young women, well endowed, whom she has brought to his notice.

Mr. Twisden is still alive, but the business of the firm

is almost entirely transacted by his nephew. Some few, like Alaric Baring, feel a prejudice against the young man; but with the world at large he has made his way well, owing to his industry, perseverance, and good temper. Partly, perhaps, for his uncle's sake, partly, perhaps, for his own, Mrs. Baring always stands up warmly for George, if her husband alludes slightingly to the junior partner of the firm, Twisden and Daintree. Alaric cannot forget the fact of the young lawyer's pursuing Elizabeth, under a feigned name. It is useless for her to pretend, still more useless to try to make him believe, that Mr. Twisden's nephew was ignorant of her hiding-place—that it was accident brought him to Madame Martineau's. The American is too shrewd for that. He knows nothing of the intercepted letter, he is ignorant how the junior partner obtained knowledge of the secret confided to his senior; but he smiles incredulously. And then Elizabeth is angry. But this is of rare occurrence now, for her husband generally takes refuge in silence when George's name is mentioned.

Once, and once only, has Elizabeth come face to face with Mrs. William Shaw. It was in Marshall and Snelgrove's shop. The little widow, pretty and smart as ever, made a movement as though she would have held out a hand—both hands—of reconciliation. Elizabeth flushed, but she looked at her aunt deliberately, and passed on without a sign of recognition. "It is the first, and I hope it may be the last, time that I cut a woman," she said afterwards to her husband. It is needless to say that Wybrowe did not marry a widow, with only a tolerable jointure; but, to Mrs. Baring's great satisfaction, the woman who

wrought such misery in her family no longer bears the name of Shaw. She married Captain Drayson two years ago.

Colonel Wybrowe has managed to escape going through the Bankruptcy Court,—is still one of the best-dressed men about town, still belongs to several clubs, is still invited to big "shoots" and deer-forests, and is still on the outlook for the woman with a large fortune, who will devote it during her life, and consecrate it when she dies, to his exclusive service.

So the years roll by. And unjust Time does not bring its revenges, or its compensations, to all. We see the ungodly, it may be, still flourishing as a green bay-tree; and all evil-doers are not brought to the pillory of the world's judgment. But for some who have suffered, like the two with whose lives I am chiefly concerned, the balance is re-adjusted; the days that are bearing them fast to middle-age are charged with a happiness which death only can touch, since it is built on "the love that casteth out fear."

THE END.

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